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THOUGHTS ON LOVE AND DEATH

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A SERIES OF SHORT MEDITATIONS

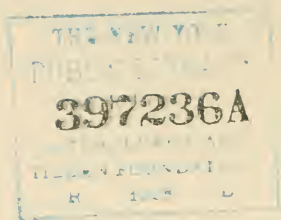
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THE BISHOP OF LONDON

NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

[1918]

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I VISITED the writer's wife all the time of her last illness, and have watched with admiration the courage and fortitude with which he faced life without her visible presence, and went straight on with his parochial duties; and I feel sure that the thoughts of such a man on Love and Death, when the Love has been so great, and the Death so bravely faced, will help others.

A. F. LONDON.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

A FEW words of explanation appear to be necessary as to the origin of these "Thoughts."

There comes a time in the lives of most of us when the questions with which these meditations are concerned thrust themselves upon our consideration. They become, for a time at any rate, the all-absorbing subject of our thoughts. We cannot, even if we would, escape them. The mind reverts to them at every unoccupied moment, and employs itself persistently upon the same subject.

There is no doubt that, at such times as these, we do well to let our mental inclinations have their way; and so far from endeavouring to suppress such thoughts, we do well to encourage them, striving to learn as best we can whatever lesson Providence may desire to teach.

The paragraphs contained in this small

volume are the results of an effort to accomplish this. They were written down, not with a view to publication, but merely in order to stimulate thought and to make such thought as exact as possible. They were committed to writing from time to time, amid the varied occupations of an active life, often without reference to what had already been set down. This will account for the form—that of paragraphs more or less brief—in which this work appears.

It will be observed that where the various sections bear on one main theme they have been grouped into chapters; while, within the chapters, a new title is used to denote a new sequence of thought.

These notes will be found to be more suggestive than exhaustive, and are in no sense a treatise. They are thoughts or reflections, and nothing more. Such is our human nature, however, that the thoughts of one are often the thoughts of others, and the experience of a single individual may reveal the secrets of many hearts. It is in the hope, therefore, that others—who shall herein find their own thoughts expressed for them—may ex-

perience something of the same solace as was felt by the writer, that these meditations are now offered to the public. They are put forward at the earnest suggestion of many who have derived help and encouragement from them in their manuscript form.

It only remains to be said that the following pages were written under a profound conviction that, when we attempt to contemplate such transcendent subjects as death and the future after death, we must listen to *all* the evidence—that is to say, we must employ all our faculties and all our instincts, and that the evidence which they bring to us is both valid and good.

Whether, therefore, the following expressions have been prompted by faith, or hope, love, intuition, or, lastly, reason, they have been written under a firm persuasion that, though faith may tell us much, and reason may tell us something, yet intuition, hope, and—above all—love, are also guides (and reliable guides) to the attainment of the truths we seek. Our personality is complex, and truth will approach it from various directions. It is

more than possible that what from one point of view is sometimes regarded as "mere sentiment," may as a matter of fact, in questions of this nature, lead us nearer to the truth than all the disquisitions of philosophers or all the calculations of the exact sciences.

At any rate, reason can tell us little in such matters. We must look to other and higher faculties if we are to move with certain footsteps in that exalted region whither Death leads us and Love is fain to follow.

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CHAPTER I

ABOVE THE SILENCE

“ Being dead yet speaketh.”—HEB. xi. 4.

THE SILENCE OF THE GRAVE.
DEATH,

NEARER THROUGH

ABOVE THE SILENCE

THE SILENCE OF THE GRAVE.

THE grave is indeed silent: who at some time or other has not been troubled by this fact? One moment they are with us, we can speak to them and they can speak to us; the next moment there comes a change, a difference; the familiar voice is no longer audible, the much-loved accents have grown still.

When they left us formerly, for months or even years, we felt no misgiving. We looked forward to meeting them once more. Their absence, we felt, was unavoidable; or we thought it to be for their good. It is no different now. We look forward to meeting them again (it may be after no long waiting), and both faith and revelation assure us that they have left us for their good. Why, then, do we now feel so troubled? Why are we so distressed at the dumbness of those lips?

Yes, but in those former days we had their letters, their written messages, the tokens of their happiness and welfare, as

they were borne to us across both land and sea. We saw no form, we heard no living voice, but those messages were sufficient for us. They gave us contentment, and we found patience to wait.

It is just these messages we seem now to lack. There seems to be *no* message. All is silent. The hand that wrote is cold and motionless, the voice itself is still. It is this that so disturbs us. Oh to know that they are happy! Oh to know that all is well! O GOD, is there no one that can tell us anything? Is there no means of discovering—no voice—no ground of assurance? Is there nothing but that awful silence of the dead?

* * * *

We walked by sight before; we have now to learn to walk by faith—and faith is weak. That is the difficulty. Death finds out our weakness. Possibly this is a reason why death was sent.

This craving for a voice, a sign, a message (and few there are who have not felt it)—what does it signify? We desire the old method of assurance to which we had become accustomed—something to see, something to hear—the old method of the senses once again.

For the change from the material to the spiritual, from hearing and seeing to the

use of other and higher faculties, comes upon us in this matter very suddenly. We do not doubt it is a greater thing, and a far more blessed one, to walk by faith; but, at first, faith has to learn its weakness; and, while it learns its weakness, we still continue striving to walk by sight.

* * * *

Yet, after all, what is it that we wish for? What assurance is there that could be given to us, by means of these our earthly senses, which could bring us satisfaction and give us peace? We crave for some external evidence: what is this evidence we seek?

An Apparition?—Do we really mean it? If so, when? where? how? Should we be ready for it? Could we well endure it? Would it not break Faith's sweet assurance, He, she, now "rests in peace"?

A Voice?—Like that which spoke to Socrates? If so, when? how often? Would our knowledge of GOD'S laws allow us to trust it? Should we never question anxiously, What voice is this?

A Dream?—This seems more natural, more in keeping with GOD'S known laws. Some, indeed, have found wisdom in dreams, but others have found foolishness. This is scarcely that sure and certain evidence we seek.

What, then, is it that we wish for? What, moreover, do we desire the departed to say? If they endeavoured to speak to us concerning their new-found conditions and surroundings, could we comprehend their statements? Even in this world it is impossible for us to convey to one born blind any adequate conception of the glories of Nature; or to one born deaf any true impression of the subtle harmonies of a chord of music. We can comprehend nothing of which we have not had actual experience. How, then, could the blessed dead reveal to us anything concerning the "other world" which we could understand, or—if we could understand it—which would be adequate? How could such a revelation be made to us without lowering Faith's own conception of those good things which "God hath prepared"?

That is the consideration which comes before all others. Could any revelation made, by any method, to our ordinary senses, be made without serious and lifelong injury to our conceptions of those realities which pertain to the blessedness of the Paradise of God?

* * * *

Some people, still craving to walk by sight, would turn to "spiritualism." Let us assume that this method of holding converse with departed spirits—if such it

really be—is neither dangerous nor even unwholesome. What then? To summon the spirits of the departed to appear at our bidding; to seek to employ another intelligence to aid us in the matter, possibly for a stipulated sum of money; to call on our loved ones to prove their identity, lest we be defrauded; to regard with curiosity, or a kind of ghostly fear, those very presences that once we knew face to face, loved, and never doubted—what indignity, what a lowering, what a limiting, what servitude, is implied in it! Indeed, to employ a method such as this conveys its own penalty. For what we gain by sight, we lose by faith; what we gain by our material faculties, we lose by our spiritual ones; what we gain by limitation, we lose in power.

Whatever else is true or false, this much is certain—This is neither the gate of Paradise nor the doorway into the kingdom of God.

NEARER THROUGH DEATH.

What, then, is left to us? Is there no power that can bring us a message? Is there no voice that can come to us, no ground of assurance? is there nothing but that awful silence of the dead?

There is the power of Faith — that eye which alone can see the invisible, that ear which alone can hear celestial voices, that

gift which alone can bring Divine assurance and give us peace. And when Faith can speak, and spirit can live and move and know no trammels, how vain to crave for voices and bodily appearances, and all those former methods of communication which we knew on earth;—methods which, at their best, were but imperfect, and merely gave us glimpses of that real soul which lay beneath! Spirit knows *no* language. To speak in human language is to limit thought. To see a vision is to confine to time and space.

Why should we crave these lower methods if there can be a higher? Why should there be no higher? Why should there be no special means? Surely in a higher way it may be true literally—He, she, “being dead, yet speaketh”! “*Speaketh*,” not in sepulchral tones, nor in human language, nor in the vesture of the grave-clothes; but in a manner which befits the dignity and glory of the spirit world—by a voice there is no mistaking; which brings conviction because it comes to us purified by the nearness of the departed to His presence, and borne on the gentle breathings of the HOLY GHOST.

* * * *

We turn in thought to the contemplation of the ascended CHRIST: and there, ex-

plained in His own words, and exemplified in His own Person, we seem to find the answer that we seek.

That greatest of all presences has been withdrawn from us—withdrawn from the reach of our lower senses, but not from our higher ones. We have His own statement for saying that that was the actual purpose of His removal. He left us in order that, having ceased to know Him imperfectly by our lower senses, we might learn to apprehend Him perfectly by a higher means. He insisted that the change would prove a gain for us in every way: “*It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.*” And again: “*I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.*” Those were His words, and surely they mean this—The HOLY SPIRIT Himself will reveal Me to you; He will communicate My presence to you inwardly; and in that manner, and by this means, I shall be closer, nearer to you than ever formerly—because spirit is closer than matter, and soul is nearer than flesh.

May it not be so in the case of our beloved dead? May it not be true that, by His permission, (if they, and we, are worthy of it) they may “come” to us by that same Divine, ineffable, and exalted means?

We ceased to know the SAVIOUR little, that we might know Him more. We

ceased to see Him at all, that faith might behold Him continually. We had to lose Him to gain Him; we had to say farewell and be parted, that He might dwell in us and we in Him. But though we can no longer see His form nor hear His voice, yet ten thousand times ten thousand have borne witness that He has been nearer to us—has been known more truly, loved more perfectly—*after* He had left us, than ever He was before.

Ah, blessed SAVIOUR! if this might also be true in respect of those others whom Thou gavest to us—if they, with Thee, sanctified by Thy presence, communicated by Thy SPIRIT, might dwell with us continually—what could heart or soul wish more?

* * * *

And yet is it not true in respect of them? Do they not thus dwell with us continually? It is the persuasion—we might almost say the experience—of very many, that those whom they have loved and lost do come back to them in some such way. There is a strange sense of uplifting—a kind of new-found feeling of benediction—that arises in the hearts of those who lay themselves open to learn the lessons that death will teach. How many have borne witness to this, to a fulness and richness which has entered their life after the departure (it

almost seems because of the departure) of those they love !

This is something more than can be accounted for by the calling up of memories of the past. Certainly these memories did not avail in like manner, or affect us in at all the same way, before. There is a force and intensity added to our deeper selves which is altogether different, which we recognise as having another origin, and as coming to us by the power and presence of the HOLY GHOST.

“ By the power and presence of the HOLY GHOST ” ! But are we to exclude the possibility that GOD may suffer other means and other agencies to have their influence—even that very presence, it may be, that we knew and loved on earth ?

For if the blessed dead can still help us ; if that same presence to whom we were linked on earth by ties of kinship, whom we loved so tenderly that he or she had become a part of our spiritual selves ;—if such as these still live, and love, and still remember us, and therefore still continue to make mention of us in their prayers ; if, in short, they have become in a real sense ambassadors for us in the court of heaven—is not this fulness and richness that comes to us just what we might expect ? Is it not a sign that they are not far off, have not forgotten us, but love and serve us still ?

In truth, if they still remember us, how great would be their grief if they could no longer render service—if GOD had so separated them that they were no longer able to render help to those whom they strove to succour with the latest efforts of which they were capable on earth! Then separation were separation truly, and death were death indeed.

But if they *can* help—help from a higher sphere, in higher ways, with clearer insight and with added powers—what happiness, what consolation for them in every way! They will no longer regret the seeming separation. They will continue to do what they strove to do before, only with greater certainty and with added power. The mother will still render loving service to her children, the husband to his wife, the son to parents, and friend to friend. What new-found joy, what progress there is in it! What enlargement of purpose and of possibility! What profundity of gratitude to the tender mercy of GOD!

Ambassadors in the court of heaven! We are the richer; they are none the poorer. We may even hear from their dear lips some distant echo of the SAVIOUR'S calm assurance, "*It is expedient for you that I go away.*"

CHAPTER II

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

“ They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—ISA. xxxv. 10.

“ OF WHOM ARE ALL THINGS.” JOY IN SORROW.
LOVE-TOKENS.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

“OF WHOM ARE ALL THINGS.”

WE think, and sometimes speak, as if love were something that is not merely our own and part of ourselves, but actually our own creation—something peculiar and private, as it were, to our own personality. We allow ourselves to assume that GOD has no part in it. And so, when death comes to those we love, we speak of GOD as “blighting,” or “cutting short,” our love, and mutely charge Him with cruelty and heartlessness.

It is well to remember therefore that love, as we know it, comes from GOD. It can have no other source or origin. He not only gave us those we love, but He also gave us the love wherewith to love them. The love we feel must already have been in GOD before it could have been in ourselves. With all its depth, subtlety, and intensity, wherever we find it, love originates in Him. It must be a reflection of His character, and in a true though limited sense the express image of His person.

Moreóver, the effect can never be greater than its cause; water cannot rise higher than its source; the creature cannot surpass its Creator in anything. How, then, can we surpass Him in the matter of love? If we love, He must love no less than we do. Nay, but He must love more; His love must be infinite as Himself.

Look at it how we will, our human love is a reflection, and a dim reflection, of love as found in Him who is, by nature, Love Absolute and Infinite. Not even in this, our best and noblest quality, can we approximate, let alone surpass, that same quality as it finds itself in Him from whom all good and perfect gifts must emanate.

We may remember the words of Robert Browning where he gives expression to this truth in language of high rhapsody:

“ Would I suffer for one that I love? So wouldest
 Thou, so wilt Thou!
 So shall crown Thee the topmost, ineffablest,
 uttermost crown,
 And Thy Love fill infinitude wholly: nor leave,
 up nor down,
 One spot for the creature to stand in.”

But the thought is not a new one. It is as old as the psalmist: “ *He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?*” Or, to adapt the passage to the case in point, “ *He that made the heart, shall He not LOVE?*”

Nor is the above consideration without its consolation for us. Our loved ones may have left us; but, if we love them truly and unselfishly, it can be no real cause for grief to have committed them to the care, and we believe the nearer presence, of Him who loves them—to say the least of it—far better than we do ourselves. That which is made may not mistrust its Maker. Our lesser love may repose with confidence on that other love—that greater love—which is the origin and source of all.

JOY IN SORROW.

For death is not only a test for those who die; it is also a test for those who survive. Death tests our love. It is so easy to be self-centered in our grief. It is so easy to exclaim, How much I miss him! How weary and desolate my life has now become! or, How fair she was! or, Alas, those bygone years! We miss the welcome home, the happy smile, and all those tokens of a never-changing love. But let us beware. Let us not repine unduly. It is not love for the departed, it is self-love, self-pity, self-appreciation, that makes us feel like that. We endeavour by those terms to express our sense of how much *we* have lost—of how great a happiness is now denied to us—of the bitterness of the change that has come over us—of

the sorrow and miseries which *we* endure. Self is at the root of it. It is the thought of self which thus gives death its power to wound us. Without self, and the power of self, death would lose its sharpest sting.

Thus death tests our love. Can we be happy because they are happy? Can we find rest because they are at rest? Can we be glad in the thought of their gladness? Can we be joyful in the realisation of their joy? In former days, when love was young, we rejoiced to suffer for the one we loved. Suffering was a fit expression of the love we bore. And the greater the suffering, the greater and more worthy was the expression of our love. But now have we so changed, or has our love so changed, that we shrink from pain which is for their sake, and are mindful chiefly of ourselves?

Thus death tests our love. It tests our faith as well. Can we trust them into the hands of a faithful Creator? Can we believe that they are happy in His keeping, happy in the presence of Him in whom they had believed? Can we feel confidence in the GOODNESS which gave them to us in the first place—confidence in the LOVE which first taught us how to love them—confidence that He will surely care for them, who died that we might live? Or, on the other hand, can we trust Him no farther than we can hear and see?

Thus death tests our faith. It tests

both faith and love; and happy are we when both faith and love remain unshaken.

Ah, my beloved, gladly will I sorrow that thou mayest rejoice! “*My GOD, I have put my trust in Thee!*”

* * * *

We are tempted not only to be selfish in our grief, but ungrateful to GOD.

It is well therefore, when we suffer loss, to contemplate how much GOD gave to us, rather than how much He has taken away. For the sense of loss from which we suffer does but emphasise the value of the gift He gave. If the gift had been worthless, we should have felt no grief at all. If the gift was a great and worthy one, then it was a token of GOD's love and goodness towards us, and deserves our gratitude.

We ought not, in mere justice, to lose thought of the Giver in our appreciation of His gift. Did He give for twenty years? It might have been for ten, or five, or none at all! However small the gift, or short the time, it claims *some* gratitude. But if the gift was such that we readily acknowledge it to have been beyond all price,—what then?

And if He showed us kindness in giving, cannot we trust Him in taking? Can it be that His very goodness towards us has robbed us of both gratitude and trust?

If so, His gift has been bestowed—nay, wasted—on a barren heart.

In short, we must render back willingly, or we have received unworthily. We must thank Him for His goodness, or be guilty of baseness. Cheerfully, yet humbly, let us say it, "Thanks be to GOD."

* * * *

The great secret of happiness, when all ground for happiness seems, for a time, to have been taken away, is simply this—to contemplate in faith and gratitude the past mercies of GOD.

Is there anyone so unfortunate that he cannot recall abundant mercies vouchsafed him in the days gone by?

The happy days of childhood; the sweet, glad years now past and over; the love that came into our life; the innocent joys and pleasures of former days—the sunshine, the flowers and the cornfields, the friends we knew, the home we lived in—is there nothing we can think of? Is there nothing concerning which we can say, with deep emotion, "GOD was so good to me"? Then, why do we assume that He has nothing further for us? On what grounds do we take it for granted that He has reached the limit of His compassions, both for this world and the next?

For the contemplation of the past alone

can reveal the possibilities of the future. And the more we dwell on the goodness He *has* shown to us, the more we can believe in the goodness He *will* show to us, till nothing becomes incredible, nothing impossible, if we be worthy and He sees fit.

“Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather in the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.”

Who has not felt it? Who has not been tempted at times to shed such tears? But the poet is right: they are the vainest tears that man can know! We are given the past, that we may interpret the future. The day that *has* been is the token of the day that *shall* be, though the night be dark.

“*Whoso is wise will ponder these things :
and they shall understand the loving-kind-
ness of the LORD.*”

* * * *

For indeed two things are certain: GOD cannot die, nor can He change. Therefore, because He cannot die, what He has given once He *can* give again; and He *will* give again, because He cannot change. Love will ever act in the same manner, and seek to express itself in the most perfect fashion possible.

Moreover, because He cannot change, the gifts (at least the highest gifts) He gives us will be permanent. GOD will not give them for a time, then take away, as if He were a person liable to vicissitudes.

Death may come and seem to separate; but just because it was GOD who gave them to us we find assurance that they must be always ours. What He gave, *because He gave it*, will endure. The gift will prove worthy of the Giver—not more nor less.

“*Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder,*” as we read in the Marriage Service. Why so? Because, when GOD hath joined together, putting asunder is no longer possible. GOD changes not, nor can our human love, when found in Him.

LOVE-TOKENS.

How grieved we are when Death brings back to us those gifts—those tokens of affection—which once, in days gone by, we gave to those we loved! What we gave, we gave for always; we neither hoped nor expected to have our gifts returned. So when they come back to us (as they do) by Death’s appointment, they come with a silence and a pathos all their own. “She will never want them more,” we say, “and yet how naturally and tenderly she loved them”—“For my sake, too, who gave!”

And as we think and ponder on the matter, we learn to reason with ourselves in some such way as this:

Does GOD feel grief when Death brings back to Him the gifts He gave? Does He (the Giver) grieve when, by Death's appointment, that gift—that *living* gift—He gave is thus returned to Him?

There can be no doubt He would grieve if He loves me, and His gift is lost to me for ever. But why, then, did He suffer Death to take it away?

Perhaps He does not love me. Then, why did He give it?

Perhaps He gave it in order to cause torture by taking. Who without blasphemy can think that of HIM?

Perhaps He has not taken it away for ever. So say certain people. And has He not been at infinite pains to tell me so Himself?

Then, shame on us who will not trust Him and wait patiently for that day to come!

* * * *

For they were His gifts, regard it how we will. They were tokens of His love for us, tokens of whose meaning we can never be in doubt. There was something personal about them: "GOD gave that gift to *me*, to me alone." Do we doubt GOD's love? Has even the Cross of CHRIST no

message for us? Does all seem hard and cold? Then, here was a token which we can understand. Here was something of which we cannot be doubtful—a gift concerning which we cannot mistake GOD'S loving purpose; where we can never forget either the messenger, or the message, of His love.

And if Death has come, and, by coming, has intensified our appreciation of that gift; if by losing it we have learned to value it the more—then the messenger but speaks with clearer utterance, and the message sounds the more Divine.

Nor is this all. Having loved the *gift*, we learn to love the Giver of the gift. From the love of *man* we pass upward to the love of GOD; from the love of one whom we have *seen*, to the love of One whom we have not seen. From the cross *we* bear we learn the deeper meaning of the cross CHRIST bore. From "GOD thus loved *me*" we grow to understand how "GOD so loved the world"—from the less to the greater; till, hereafter, in beatific vision, love finds its perfect satisfaction in Himself.

* * * *

But are there no other means by which GOD speaks to us? Does He never speak to us in more human fashion, or in the familiar language of every day?

For what mean those other tokens, those messages, that come to us from friend or kinsman, which speak of love and sympathy, and of heart which beats with heart? Few are those who, at the hour of need, do not receive such messages, and find in them new strength and hope.

Whence come these voices? What has prompted them? Who has commanded those that love us thus to speak?

Surely these things are from GOD. He has prompted them. He it is who has put it into the hearts of those nearest to us to do this thing. Because they love, because we love them, they are called to be His messengers—to hold high office for Him—to soothe the sorrowful and dry the tear.

GOD is Spirit, “without body, parts, or passions.” He cannot speak to us with human voice, nor give utterance to those words of comfort and assurance which, if He still loves us, He must desire to speak. But is there close at hand no means, no method ready waiting, by which He can accomplish this? Is there no means so obvious, it may be, that we do not notice it? so familiar that we do not know? Let us not narrow our conceptions of GOD’S loving-kindness towards us. He speaks to us, no doubt, in many ways: by His SON, by His prophets, but also by our friends. They are His messengers. By

these also He would speak to us. Let us not refuse to hearken to His voice.

“I know, O LORD, that Thy judgments are right; and that Thou of very faithfulness hast caused me to be troubled.”

“O let Thy loving mercies come unto me, that I may live.”

CHAPTER III

HIDDEN PURPOSES

“ The manifold wisdom of God.”—EPH. iii. 10.

HIDDEN PURPOSES. THE FLOWER. THE BIRDS.
THE RAINBOW. THE COURSE OF NATURE.

HIDDEN PURPOSES

HIDDEN PURPOSES.

THE Divine purposes are always largely inscrutable by man, but perhaps they are never more inscrutable than in the matter of death. "*The LORD gave*"—that we can understand. But "*The LORD hath taken away*" causes some of the most anxious questionings that man can know. This must be so from the nature of the case. GOD's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. The creature cannot fully comprehend the wisdom of the Creator, nor that which is finite attain to that which exceeds all bounds.

We cannot, therefore, expect to understand the fulness of GOD's meaning in anything; much less in a matter so fraught with infinite possibilities as that of life and death. Indeed, if we could fully understand His purpose in this matter, it would, of necessity, be a very earthly and a very limited one; otherwise we could not understand it. We should be driven to the conclusion that there is no one above us, and no one beyond

us, and that GOD is even such a one as we are ourselves.

Surely, then, it is better not to claim to understand His purposes, but, rather, to accept Faith's grand assurance that GOD has purposes which lie beyond.

* * * *

For it is certain that, if the Divine purposes never go beyond what we ourselves can understand (and possibly approve), all hope of further progress for us is at an end. If it be true that GOD either *can* not, or *will* not act from a wisdom which is beyond our wisdom, then our wisdom becomes the limit of His possibilities concerning us, and we cannot advance. It becomes impossible for us to be directed towards any ultimate or unseen purpose, or led along a path to any fixed but far-off destination, for the simple reason that both the purpose and the destination are unknown to us. On such a supposition, GOD can guide us no farther than either we can guide ourselves or advise Him to guide us. The ultimate purpose and drift of things must be left out of count.

If, on the other hand, we once allow that GOD may possibly deal with us in accordance with a wisdom and knowledge greater than our own, then we must be prepared for great surprises; and the greater the knowledge, and the more far-reaching the wisdom,

the greater will be the surprises which we must expect. If we once admit it to be possible that GOD may be unwilling, or perhaps unable, to suffer Himself to be limited by our own limited estimates of His powers and possibilities, then we must be prepared for reversals (often great reversals) of our estimates, and for disappointments (often bitter disappointments) of our most reasonable hopes. We shall not be able to say beforehand what course He may see fit to order for us. We shall neither see the limits of His purposes nor discern the end He has in view.

And if at times misfortunes threaten us; if the very thing which we most dread draws closer to us every moment; if our prayers appear to be unanswered; if we grow to think regretfully of our father on earth, and bitterly of our FATHER in heaven, and wonder why the One so sternly denies us what the other, had he the power, would so willingly grant—then let us remember that, if GOD be guiding us (guiding us to some far-off and, it may be, glorious purpose), this is just what we might most reasonably expect. He will act in accordance with His wisdom and His greatness, and nothing less. Whatever pain or loss He may cause us to suffer, should His wisdom approve it, He will not hesitate, and He will not shrink. He that is wise can never be less than wise; He will not—

however much we may wish it—act with lower or less worthy intentions; love which is highest can never prove base. These distresses which now trouble us are indications that He has not suffered Himself to be limited by our powers of apprehension, or adapted His action to our point of view. Indeed, they may be the very tokens of His guidance, and the actual imprints of His love.

Our duty is to wait. We must be content to let Him guide us. We must suffer Him to do the best and highest for us that is possible. We must trust Him without hesitation, and follow Him without dismay.

Wisdom is ever justified of her children. One day, doubtless, we shall understand.

THE FLOWER.

And not only do we discern this truth from the contemplation of GOD'S dealings with ourselves; the simple facts of Nature seem to teach the same lesson.

How wonderful is a flower, how delicate its mechanism, and how vital the purpose which it serves in the life-history of the plant! The petals protect and shelter the seed-vessels; they attract the bees with their sweetness; while the bees, or other insects, carry the pollen which makes

fertile the seed. Science can tell us this, and a great deal more.

But that is not all. Its beauty appeals to man. Its grace of form, its delicacy of perfume, the brightness of its colouring, convey a meaning to him. Man has that within him to which this beauty makes a mute appeal. Poets sing of it; moralists read lessons from it; all, whether young or old, are gladdened by it, and hasten to render their tribute of wonder and admiration to a thing so fair.

Here, then, are two purposes which are served by the flower—the natural purpose to the plant, the further service to man. Which is the first, and which is the greater, of these purposes? Is a flower a mechanism necessary for the fertility of the seed-vessel, and nothing more? Is the other a mere chance benefit which comes to man unintended and unsought?

But if flowers rejoice the heart of man, does not the fertility itself insure the permanence of that which gives man pleasure? Perhaps, then, the giving of pleasure is the chief purpose, and the other the secondary? Or perhaps there is no chief purpose; perhaps both purposes are equally included, or, it may be, are one and the same?

In any case, man's love of a flower is a fact in itself, and may be judged of as a fact in itself. It is quite as certain a fact as the other, and considerably more obvious.

The other, the natural fact, might never have been discerned; and, after all, men loved flowers before they studied botany. Is, then, the fact which botany reveals to us to destroy the significance of this other and human fact? If so, this other fact can equally be held to destroy the significance of the fact revealed by botany; so that, logically, a flower can be shown to serve no purpose at all.

But however we may regard the matter, it is not without a large significance. It suggests to us that, when we discern one purpose, we must not close our eyes to other purposes. The Creator is not limited. We may well believe that He has many purposes in many things—in life, in death—and that, while thinking of one of His creatures, He is mindful of all.

THE BIRDS.

Or, when a bird sings in the springtime, what are we to conclude from that? Is it to charm its mate, or uplift man's heart, or both?

Or, if no one be near, is it to charm its mate, or give pleasure to listening angels, or render glory to God? Which of these purposes would we undertake to eliminate with certainty, and on what grounds?

THE RAINBOW.

Or, again, a rainbow, looked at from one point of view, is but the natural result of rays of sunlight combined with the prismatic action of drops of rain.

And there can be little doubt that, in far-back primeval times, long before man was born to wonder at it, the sunlight and the raindrops were ever the same by nature, and rainbows made the heavens beautiful as they do to-day.

But when man came, he saw in the rainbow a promise and a hope. We read in the Book of Genesis that the rainbow was given as a sign of an "everlasting covenant between GOD and every living creature." When the dark cloud threatened, and man grew fearful, this bow of fleeting and ethereal beauty spoke to him of faith and comfort; he saw in it a token of a promise, and he learned to hope. It was a poetic idea, and a beautiful one, to say the least of it; and none will regret that the impress made on man's soul in those early days was so deep and true to him, that he has recorded it in those everlasting pages which will endure till time shall end.

But did man deceive himself? Did he, in ignorance, read a message in the rainbow that was not there? (Strange ignorance to be able so to read!) Are we to take it for granted that GOD is so limited that He

cannot use His own handiwork for His own purposes—cannot write a message in a language that can be read by all? Or, if this is deemed impossible, are we to believe that man possesses some strange capacity for receiving strong impressions that arise from nothing and that come from nowhere?

Something in the gold and violet of the raindrops, and something in man's soul, found correspondence. That is a fact. Man did not reason; he merely looked and wondered; and he knew! Such is the soul of man, and such is the soul of Nature, and such is GOD in both!

It has ever been so, and it will ever continue to be so. Men may tell us of primeval times when Nature was, and man was not; they may speak in tones of superiority concerning ancient peoples who were ignorant of the laws of optics; yet man is such that he will not only continue to see a message in the rainbow, but the beauty of a flower, the song of a bird, the glitter of the sea, the glory of the sunshine, the whole grandeur of Nature, will speak to him of an "Everlasting Covenant;" and, whether in sorrow or in gladness, he will discern therein the token of a promise, and learn once more to hope.

THE COURSE OF NATURE.

And the whole voice of Nature tends to confirm this estimate. Science tells us that, for countless ages of the past, Nature has been working, evolving, towards one supreme climax—the creation of man! During millions of years before man appeared on the earth, Nature was making ready for him. Every process, every change, every adaptation, may be interpreted in terms of reference to this, the last and greatest production of all.

If this be so, then the Creator's care for man is truly marvellous. His provision for our welfare and happiness would appear to be inexhaustible. It is impossible to say how long ago it began, and it is equally impossible to say when it will end—certainly not with the grave. GOD is never regardless of the meanest of His creatures; He cannot, therefore, be less mindful of the greatest of all.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your FATHER. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” It was not a teacher of science who taught us this; but the truth is the same.

CHAPTER IV

CONCERNING DEATH

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”—I COR. xv. 45.

A GIFT OF NATURE. A GIFT OF GRACE. PAIN
AND DEATH. IN SCORN OF DEATH. VICTORY.
THE TIME APPOINTED. PRAYER AND DEATH.
REVERENCE FOR THE DEAD. HARVEST JOY.

CONCERNING DEATH

A GIFT OF NATURE.

WHAT is death? From the physical point of view, death appears as a final gift of Nature which puts an end to all bodily ills. Nature appears to be continually striving for our health and happiness. We hear, for instance, of the white corpuscles of the blood—the “leucophagi,” as they are termed—those scavengers of the human frame whose duty is to encompass and destroy the invading enemy that brings disease and death. We are familiar with the fact that Nature inclines to the healing of wounds, sores, or fractures. In most, if not all, diseases, the best that human skill can effect is to clear away hindrances to recovery, and to provide suitable conditions under which Nature may effect her cure. But when the ills that beset us threaten permanently both health and happiness, or when the human frame becomes worn out from lapse of years, Nature is at no loss. She has another gift, another remedy; she makes another final effort to

end the body's weariness or suffering, and make all things new. This is death!

Nor can we reasonably regard this episode as a sign of Nature's failure—as an indication, so to speak, that she has completed her efforts for our welfare, and abandons her position as the body's parent and protectress. It has the appearance, rather, of a sudden turning movement (to use a military phrase) which routs the foe, and renders him harmless for ever afterwards. For Nature does not abandon the body; she takes it back into herself. The process of the body's decay after death is just as marvellous and as inexplicable as the body's growth, and just as carefully carried out. Nature knows her own! She takes it back as she gave it, slowly, surely! She does not disregard one single fragment. But as regards the troubles of the body which perplexed, distressed, and pained our human consciousness, she has applied her sovereign remedy: she has opened the doors of the prison-house, and let the spirit go free. She stands like a good angel of the LORD, with a drawn sword, waiting; she says to pain and suffering, as we know them, "Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther." This is death!

Nature never hesitates, is never at a final loss. She is inexorable; she will not suffer herself to know defeat. This is man's great hope and consolation. "Every

good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

A GIFT OF GRACE.

And man naturally accepts this point of view, consciously or unconsciously. The sufferer, stricken with quick disease, will turn in thought to Nature's lesser healing processes; he hopes for a return of health and painlessness. But the sufferer smitten with slow disease—some mortal complaint for which human skill provides no remedy—is not left hopeless. He knows (blest token of GOD'S mercy!) that his trial time is limited; that there is a sovereign remedy; and he learns to look forward, with a sense of relief and satisfaction, to the certain close. The mere contemplation of the grim horror of it, if no such release were possible, is sufficient to make us realise the peace and blessedness that is offered to us by this friend of man.

Some people, when life has gone wrong—people who have suffered shipwreck in the world—will grasp at this reward impatiently, and by self-destruction will endeavour to snatch it from the very hands of GOD. But this is desecration. Death is, by nature, a thing Divine; it is a reward

for patience, industry, and endurance, not for cowardice nor sloth. It is a cup in the hand of the LORD, and those who drink of it must drink, in faith and penitence, with Him.

PAIN AND DEATH.

Nor may we judge of death in the light of that experience which frequently accompanies it—that of suffering. Suffering often precedes death, and may be intimately associated with it, but not always. Death is often sudden, and therefore painless; and, whether sudden or not, it is frequently free from pain or any conscious form of bodily distress. Or, in those cases where suffering is a prominent symptom, Nature, by the onset of unconsciousness, commonly provides her own anæsthetic; so that the only final suffering felt, or evident, is that which is experienced by those who watch, and wait, and live.

Again, after extreme suffering and immediate danger of death, men frequently recover. Death and suffering in such a case become quite separate; we are forced to dissociate them. And men, strangely enough, soon forget the pain. Pain is a thing we do not remember painfully; we recall it rather with a sense of satisfaction, such as is felt by the soldier who willingly

recalls his past dangers and hardships, or, it may be, proudly shows his scars and wounds. We cannot, then, with any show of reason, attribute to death the suffering that may, or may not, precede it. The suffering is the hardship, the suffering is the trial, but it has nothing to do with death itself. As a matter of fact, death brings relief from it.

Let us not, therefore, judge the character of this final visitation by the character of the trial that may precede it. We may not clothe this angel in garments which do not pertain to him. Clouds may betoken a storm, and the storm may be long and terrible; but the sunlight and peace which follow have another meaning and a separate existence,—with a joy that is all their own.

IN SCORN OF DEATH.

Yet how large death looms on life's horizon; how considerable, how important it appears to be! It shapes our estimates of things; it regulates our thoughts and actions all through life. We may try to forget it, but we cannot. We may think we have forgotten it, but it meets us by the way. Death means so much in life that it is impossible to realise what life would be without it. Take death away, and we should recognise neither ourselves,

nor one another, nor the world in which we live.

Yet, in spite of this, man is never so great as when he despises death; never so true to himself as when he disregards it. The soldier mocks at it, sings as he marches towards it, or greets it with a cheer; falls low before it, yet is unsubdued. The martyr welcomes it, rejoices in it. Thus, and thus only, can he express his love and adoration; thus, and thus only, can he find true joy. The man of faith lies down to die. He looks death in the face, yet sees not death, but life; not defeat, but victory.

Great though death is, large though it looms on life's horizon, man is never so small as when he esteems it great; never so great as when he deems it nothingness.

“Fear death?” (says the poet)

“No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my
peers,
The heroes of old.”

Or, as we read of Another:

“He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore GOD also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.”

Love can find no other expression so apt by which to express itself. Faith can find no other extremity by which to show forth its power. Life can find no other test

by which to prove its sterling quality. And this not in accordance with the degree to which men consider death, or show homage to it; but in accordance with the degree to which they despise it, and set it at naught.

Among all members of the animal kingdom, man alone is conscious that he must die. Yet, so far from discouraging him, so far from rendering him fearful or over-cautious, such is the soul of man that, without thought, without hesitation, he disregards this fact, he overleaps this seeming obstacle. The wings of his spirit seem plumed to soar above it in another atmosphere. Whatever moves his soul—be it love, honour, loyalty, patriotism, high principle in any form—can life, he asks, be valued more than these? How gladly will he die for them! Man's inmost consciousness gives assurance to him that such qualities have a value which transcends this life, are part of another and a greater life, and to that greater life himself belongs.

Death was made to be despised, and man was made to despise it. In so doing he sets the true estimate on death, and the true value on his own dignity. Death is a means—perhaps the chiefest means—by which man finds the ultimate expression of the greatness of his soul!

VICTORY.

To some—indeed, to most of us—death comes secretly and in disguise: we die, but we do not know that we are dying: we pass away as naturally and unconsciously as we fall asleep. To others death comes openly and without disguise. The soldier as he goes forth to battle sees it and realises it. He realises it, and yet despises it. Death may come, or death may not come—what cares he? At the call of duty, or for the sake of King and country, he risks everything; as amid the roar of the guns and the cheers of his comrades he bears down upon the foe.

To conquer thus, or to meet death thus, is victory in either case. We do well to acclaim such efforts and to emulate such sacrifice. What can a man do more, how can he show greater love than this—that he “lay down his life for his friends”?

Yet sometimes we see another struggle and another victory, more glorious still. It is a struggle against death, and a victory over death; but the conditions are different. To those who thus engage there is no *risk* of death, for they lie upon a bed of sickness, and death is certain. Death is not an *episode* to such as these—a possible contingency in the achievement of some further purpose—it is all and everything: death fills the whole horizon: there is nothing

else! Nor does death come suddenly to such, or at an instant; he draws near gradually; day by day and week by week. They are not summoned to meet him at the sound of the trumpet or amid the shouts of their comrades; but, alone, and in silence, they look into his face. They possess no health of body nor buoyancy of spirit to give them courage at that great moment; but amid pain and weariness, in spite of wasting flesh and growing feebleness, they press bravely forward to meet the foe. It is not a struggle of man against man or nation against nation; it is a struggle of spirit against flesh, of faith against doubt, of light against darkness, of that which liveth against that which dies. All we are in ourselves, all that life has made us, all we have of faith, of courage, of patience and endurance, is involved in this last contest. Without the ease that had been longed for, or the sense of rest (it may be) that had been prayed for, there is no repining, no looking backward, no complaint or hesitation, but willingly and consciously the combat is continued to the latest breath.

How pitiful such scenes appear to us, and yet how glorious! How frail is man's body, yet how great his soul! Surely there is a strength which overcometh all things; surely there is a crown which never fades!

THE TIME APPOINTED.

Indeed, it appears to be the fact that in this foreknowledge of death man finds his highest and most peculiar dignity. In the whole of the animal kingdom, man alone is possessed of the knowledge that he must die. Whatever instincts the lower animals may be endowed with which tend towards self-preservation (they flee from danger, they shrink from pain), they possess no actual consciousness that they must die. The foreknowledge of this fact is given to man only. He alone knows; he alone is privileged to contemplate the fact that some day, sooner or later, the end must come.

And yet man does not know his hour of death. He knows that he must die, but the actual time is hidden from him. He dies, yet he does not know that he is dying; or he dies after some short warning of death's approach.

It is well that this is so. It is well that we should know that we must die. The knowledge of this fact gives a special dignity, and adds a special meaning, to our present existence. It enlarges our outlook, it extends our perspective, it forces us to ask the question, What lies beyond?

It is also well that we do not know the time appointed for us. If our hour of death were known to us, our present life

would become unlivable. We should lose our interest in our present duties. We should become unfitted for this life, and not yet adapted to the next. Man is so constituted that he cannot labour for an earthly morrow which he knows will never come.

Yet even these "present duties" are GOD'S service. These, too, must be performed. To cease to do them would be to despair not only of this life, but of the next as well. The simplest task, the meanest duty, just because it forms an essential portion of an infinite life, has an infinite meaning. We may not despise it or neglect it. Our commonest duties must be persevered with—they must be performed with care and diligence—until the end.

What, then? Life is nothing, yet life is everything. We must learn to despise it, yet prize it above all things. We must be content to live it, that we may be ready to leave it. We must trust it, and yet mistrust it. We must value the present for the sake of the future; we must value the future because the present is worthless.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

PRAYER AND DEATH.

And then in the matter of prayer. How closely associated, and yet at times how contrary to one another, prayer and death appear to be! There is possibly no event in all our human experience concerning which we pray so earnestly as we do concerning death. So far as we ourselves are concerned this may not be true; death may find no large place in our petitions. For we do not pray *for* death, lest coward-like we should seem to wish to desert our post of duty; we do not pray to *escape* death, for many desire death—desire it as one of the best of the gifts of Nature, and as one of the highest gifts of grace.

But when we come to think of others—of those we love—it is very different. Death at once becomes a subject of surpassing interest. Because it is a matter altogether beyond our own control, yet altogether important to both life and love, death at once becomes a leading subject of our prayers. The thought of it troubles us, the near approach of it dismays us; we hope against it, we fight against it with all means in our power. What earnestness, what urgency, now take hold of us! What spoken words, what unspoken longings! what tears, what prayers, what litanies! “O GOD, have mercy;” “LORD, grant that he, or she, may live.”

There are few of us who, some time or another, have not prayed like this. There are few of us who have not someone thus to pray for them. Few die unprayed for. Doubtless, if prayer could save us, nearly all would live.

Yet death is just the one thing certain. It is absolutely certain. None can escape it. In the lives of all of us there must come a time when, in spite of all the love which is felt for us, in spite of all the prayers that may be offered for us, the end must come. What, then? Are these things contrary to one another? Is prayer powerless? Does love mock us? Is death the limit, the final barrier, which neither prayer nor love can pass?

Yet, if it were possible for us always to obtain our petitions in this matter—if it were possible for us so to prevail upon the Supreme Disposer as to keep death continually at bay, and thus gain endless life on earth—should we be satisfied? Nay, rather, should we not be *dissatisfied*, more than dissatisfied? should we not ask in dismay, “Is life, then, better than death, that GOD thus hears my prayers?” “Are we so wise, is the Creator so comparatively foolish, that *we* know what is best?”

Or, in the matter of love, is death contrary to love? Were love and death ordained merely to annul each other? Was death ordained to destroy, suddenly

and entirely, all the hopes and longings that love so patiently builds up? Love we know; we have had experience of it; death we do *not* know. Surely we must interpret the thing we do "not know" by the thing that we "know." We must accept love's estimate of death, rather than death's estimate of love. We must seek to explain the thing which is unknown and beyond us, by that which stirs the inmost pulses of the soul.

Yet, as a matter of fact, when we come to examine it, we find that death is not contrary to these things. Death does not hinder love, nor does it hinder prayer; it does not make us cease to love those whom it has taken from us, or make us less desirous to pray for them. It encourages both; it gives to both a higher meaning and greater intensity. So far as we can test it, death is not an enemy, but a true and actual friend. It seems to suggest to us that these things, so far from being contrary, are in harmony with one another; that prayer does not do less than we ask, but more; that death itself is not an end, but a new beginning; that all three work together for the same object—all have the same ultimate meaning—all proceed in the same direction—and that one day we shall make proof of it, understand it, and be satisfied.

"He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him a long life: even for ever and ever."

REVERENCE FOR THE DEAD.

Then, again, one further question: Why do men show reverence for the dead? There is, perhaps, no instinct more natural, no practice more universal. Yet what does it signify? What, for example, is the meaning of the custom, so often witnessed, of baring the head—in the street or by the roadside—as some funeral procession passes by?

Is it that we seek to bring comfort to the mourners as they take note of the honour we thus render to the memory of one they loved? This can scarcely be the reason; for we should have felt the same reverence, and possibly made the same expression of it, had there been no one there to witness it.

Is it that we associate death with suffering, and feel sympathy with the dead on that account? Then let us bare our heads before the hospital, but not before the hearse. A dead body can feel no suffering; pagans and Christians are both agreed in that.

Or is it that we feel sorrow for the departed owing to the fact that they have died, and seek expression for the thought, "Poor man!" "Poor woman!" "Thank GOD I live!"? Impossible. Human nature is no craven before the thought of death.

Or is it just a passing fashion which we

follow heedlessly? No, it is a primal instinct of humanity, always and everywhere, to reverence the dead,

Or perhaps it is that Death is a great Personality—and a Divine one, too—so that instinctively we recognise the fact, and feel a natural reverence for whatever he has touched?

It is difficult to say. Shakespeare seems to suggest an answer when he tells us, "One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin." Death is a touch of Nature, truly. But so is birth, and birth does not move us in the same way at all.

In fact, death seems to strike a chord which resounds with a depth of harmony all its own. There is a solemn yet infinite music in it which subdues all hearts, and, like all true music, leads us "to the edge of the infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that."

There can be little doubt that a general conviction of annihilation would extinguish all reverence for the dead.

HARVEST JOY.

And, then, when death is past, and all is over, how glad we are to hear our dead well spoken of! To hear their virtues extolled, their merits appreciated—how eagerly we look for it, how gratefully we

listen to it! It seems to assuage our sorrow, and minister healing to our inmost soul.

And yet how strange it is that this should be so! Our sorrow is assuaged by assurances of the value of that which we have lost. We are consoled, not by that which minimises our loss and makes it seem smaller to us, but by that which emphasises it and makes it seem greater. We find relief in expressions which place the highest, rather than the lowest, value on that of which we have been deprived.

It might appear that to call attention to the virtues of some loved one who is now lost to us, to praise the character of one whose presence is no longer with us, was merely to double sorrow and to emphasise regret. But it is not so. The exact contrary is the case.

How, then, are we to account for it? Why does the good thus spoken bring us consolation rather than evoke distress? Is it because it is a sign of sympathy? Sympathy, if it be true, must be appreciative; it must realise to the full the sorrow with which it desires to sympathise. And sympathy, as we know, has a wonderful power to heal. It is a sign of the love which others have for us, and, being such, is a thing acceptable in itself.

But this does not explain the difficulty. The question still remains, Why does sym-

pathy thus prove acceptable to us? Why does not the very probing of our grief, so necessary to sympathy, cause more pain than the sympathy can cause consolation? Why do we not call out in pain, even to those who thus desire to sympathise, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace"?

How, then, are we to account for the matter? Why do we rejoice to hear our dead well spoken of? Is it because we love them? No doubt. To speak evil of the dead is intolerable; it wounds love at its most tender moments; to speak well of them is in harmony with our sense of love. That is a fact. But, again, it does not explain the difficulty. Why is it that praise is thus in harmony with our sense of love? Why, indeed, does it not distress us just because we love them? Why does not love prompt us to call out once more in bitterness, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace"?

Certainly this is not the method of consolation we employ when a man has lost his money or his property. We do not attempt to point out to him the value, or the worth, of that which has been lost. Rather, we do what we can to help him to forget it. We endeavour to avoid all emphasis, and make his loss appear as little inconvenient and as small as possible.

What, then, is the answer to our question, Why do we rejoice to hear our dead well

spoken of? Why do we feel a sweet emotion—why do our hearts swell with pride and gratitude—as we listen to such words?

It would appear to be the fact that we are unable to realise death as death. We seem to be so constituted as to be incapable of accepting death as an accomplished fact. We cannot think of those we love as dead; we think of them as living; only in a more consecrated atmosphere and in a higher life. We are consoled by these assurances of the greatness of our loss, because we cannot accept the proposition that it is a loss at all. Instinctively we feel that character lives on; that it is an asset still; that to praise the departed is not to emphasise a loss, but to realise a gain; that it is with us as it is with the reapers—We rejoice at the richness of the harvest, and the fulness of the sheaves which have been gathered in.

CHAPTER V

IMMORTALITY

“ He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him a long life: even for ever and ever.”—PSA. xxi. 4.

SCIENCE AND IMMORTALITY. APPROXIMATIONS.
“ TO ASK A QUESTION.” MIND AND MATTER.
BIRTH AND DEATH. SLEEP AND DEATH. BEYOND
ALL PRICE. AN ARGUMENT. SOUL AND
INTELLECT.

IMMORTALITY

SCIENCE AND IMMORTALITY.

PHILOSOPHERS, from Plato onwards, are practically agreed that man is by nature a spiritual being. The science of psychical research is said by many, most competent to judge, to have gone far to demonstrate that man's soul survives his body. "Spiritualism" is thought by some to give like evidence.

All of which is good, but it is not sufficient. We desire not merely to know that man survives death; we desire to know if survival of death is likely to be of any value to us. A certain scientific writer goes so far as to speak of a laboratory proof of survival after death. He does not claim to have discovered it, but it is interesting to ask what benefit it would be to mankind even if he had discovered it. It would teach us a natural fact without a spiritual one. We should have immortality, but without GOD. Who dare contemplate it? To know nothing more concerning the departed than that they

are alive in disembodied state; that they have plunged into an unknown deep; that in a laboratory, under certain conditions, the soul may be seen leaving the dying body; that, for all we know, the dead have nothing more to love and console them, to tend them and lead them onward, than the "everlasting arms" of natural laws and forces—who would adventure it? Why, the Pluto and Tartarus of the pagans were blessedness compared with this! If there be nothing further that we can know concerning this matter beyond the fact that man survives, then assuredly it were better for us not to know so much. It were preferable that we should be permitted to believe that, when death comes to us, man passes, soul and body, into nothingness. We do know, in that case, what becomes of us, and it brings some comfort.

But if we are to be thrust out into a region unknown, vast, and infinite, where angels may sing to us or devils may plague us, as chance and environment may deem to be best—if we are to enter upon a possibly endless existence from which GOD, His sacred Presence, and His loving care, have been eliminated—who dare contemplate it? Who would not recoil from it? Nay, who would not cry out, "Cursed be life! thrice cursed be death! cursed the day I was born, and cursed the mother that bore me!"

In fact, men will always experience a sense of something strange and unsatisfying, to use no stronger terms, when they seek for proofs of such a truth as survival after death by any method which may be termed "scientific." The reason is not far to seek. Science as such does not include questions as to the nature and being of GOD. Her method is the observation of objective phenomena (of whatever nature those phenomena may be); the knowledge that she seeks is the correlation of such phenomena one with another. The question as to the ultimate meaning of these phenomena and their First Cause, if any, does not lie within her province. She is concerned with the noting of certain footprints in the path of Nature, apart from the question of whose those footprints are or what such footprints may ultimately denote.

In such a question, therefore, as that of survival after death science leaves us at the very point where exact knowledge is all-important.

Is survival of death worth having? What is the nature of that Power which controls man's destiny? Science offers no reply, or, by using the terms "force" or "law" to describe that Power, only touches on the fringe of the ultimate question.

Yet, look at it how we will, our human consciousness is such that the thought of

eternity without GOD is intolerable. It means hell simply. In fact, "eternal separation from GOD" is a well-known definition of that term. Man is never happy in this life without GOD, although he may endure it; but to offer proof of survival without the thought of GOD is to offer proof of the existence of hell without a suggestion of heaven. It is to open out a vista of endless possibilities without a knowledge of those things which most concern our peace.

The result is infinitely less than that to which man instinctively aspires, and for which he cannot help but hope. It takes him only part of the way, certainly not as far as he feels that he can go. Indeed, if he can go no farther, he would prefer not even to have gone so far.

What is the nature and character of that Power which controls our destiny? Everything depends on the answer to that question. Science can give no answer, philosophy can give no certain answer. It is to faith, and faith only, we must look to find the answer that we seek.

* * * *

Nor must we forget that, whatever evidence of the survival of the human spirit after death may be provided by psychological research as a science, or by

certain individuals who may lay claim to have seen spirit forms times and again, the best attested instance of survival (including the Resurrection of the Body) is that of JESUS CHRIST. Here is an historic instance which has withstood the criticism of wellnigh two thousand years; which forms the basis of the greatest religion that the world has known; which has had power to change the lives and raise the hopes of millions; which has inspired loud songs of gratitude and called forth unceasing prayers and tears, because it gives assurance to one of the highest hopes and one of the deepest, purest longings of humanity, which is simply this—Immortality *and* GOD.

APPROXIMATIONS.

Are our highest thoughts of GOD—those flashes of soul where we seem to reach out to an ideal of goodness, love, and justice, ineffable and infinite—to be relied upon? Is GOD as good as we are capable of imagining Him to be, or hoping that He is? Are our higher thoughts, or our lower ones, more likely to approximate to the real truth concerning Him?

It is certain that our educated intellect (which is our higher form of intellect) can arrive at a mathematical conclusion, or deal with a problem of science, more quickly

and more truthfully than it could when in the lower and undeveloped stage of childhood or of infancy. It is equally certain that man, as a race, attains to a truer knowledge of Nature, and a greater control over her powers, when in a developed state of civilisation, than was possible for him in the days of his primitive savagery. The present age of steam and electricity is far removed from the age of flint and stone, and a great deal nearer to a true apprehension of material facts.

All which would appear to suggest that our highest and best thoughts of GOD (which, in a measure, are the product of the ages, as well as the result of development both natural and spiritual) are more likely to approximate to Him as He really is than are our former, undeveloped, less inspired, and lower thoughts concerning Him.

Or to take another analogy: What a contrast we often notice between some row of unsightly buildings, such as too often disfigure our landscape, and that other and more stately erection where grace and proportion, as well as dignity, have been allowed to find a place. Why is the difference so remarkable? Why is it that few or none can fail to notice it? Because the one is a lower thought of the architect, and the other a higher. And, being higher, it approximates more closely to the truth

and beauty of those still more glorious structures erected by Nature herself.

As a certain writer has said: "Our highest thoughts are likely to be nearest to the truth: they must be stages in the direction of truth, otherwise they could not have come to us and been recognised as highest." This appears to be another way of saying that our developed intuition of what is higher and lower in our conception of the Divine Mind is to be relied upon as far as it goes. It would indeed be very difficult to deny it.

It is certain, at any rate, that our highest thoughts of GOD cannot exceed the truth. It is not given to the creature to surpass the Creator in anything; and to imagine that we can discern heights of power, or goodness, to which the Supreme Himself is as yet a stranger, is to exalt our mind above that of the Supreme, and to turn thought to foolishness. Or to hold that, while GOD has higher conceptions than ourselves, He may nevertheless prefer to act on lower ones, is neither reason nor faith, but mere blasphemy.

Yet the matter scarcely stands in need of argument. We have the promise that the HOLY SPIRIT will lead us into all truth. And to the heart of faith this fact alone will ever bring a firm conviction that, so far as we seek and strive to follow such leading faithfully, our highest thoughts

are not *our* thoughts at all: they are His thoughts. They cannot deceive us; they must speak reality; for they are the thoughts implanted in us by the Truth Himself.

* * * *

Or to apply the principle to the case in point: The intuition that man possesses of his own immortality, from whatever source it comes to him, is a worthy one. That GOD should have further and ultimate purposes for us reaching forward into eternity is, to say the least of it, a great conception. Have we devised it, or has this conception come from above? Can our minds imagine something greater, vaster, more just, more moral, more noble, than the mind of the Eternal? Shall our highest conceptions of GOD and His greatness be snubbed out of us, as it were, and we be told by facts as they show themselves eventually, that we have been fools for our pains? If so, then *we are gods*, and the Great Eternal is a mere nonentity! We have conceived something which He has *not* conceived, we have seen a vision to which His eyes are blind! Is this probable, is it thinkable? Is it not rather true, as the prophet expresses it: "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts*"? The best

we can think, the noblest we can conceive, is but a dim, far-off, though real approximation to that wisdom which is infinite and that love which is Divine.

“ TO ASK A QUESTION.”

And then, again, how strong is this conception of a life beyond! How it thrusts itself upon our consideration! How we question about it, strive to know more concerning it! How we examine it from every point of view! All of which appears to constitute an evidence in itself. For the very fact that we have power to ask such questions implies ability to understand the answer, or some real approximation to it; otherwise such questions could not be asked. We may not, indeed, be able to answer all the questions we are capable of asking, but we are impelled to seek an answer. And the fact that we seek an answer is a guarantee that there *is* an answer; and that one day, here or elsewhere, we shall find it, understand it, and be satisfied.

Is it possible, then, for man's consciousness to rise to the height of wondering what is on the other side of the grave, and yet there be nothing there after all? Is not the very power to ask the question remarkable in itself? What has instigated

him to ask it? Indeed, the very fact that we can ask the question appears to be a sufficient evidence that there is a question to ask.

* * * *

“But we don't know what becomes of us when we die.” How often we hear those words, or words to that effect!

Sweet sense of immortality that can profess such doubtfulness! How do we know that we “don't know” these things? Could bird or beast profess that ignorance? Nay, our very scepticism bears witness to the truth!

MIND AND MATTER.

Can consciousness be a resultant of matter—say of the nerves and brain tissue?

Certain facts seem to point in this direction. A blow on the head, the action of an anæsthetic, certain forms of disease, or even natural sleep, can destroy or modify our consciousness by a process that is purely physical. Which seems to suggest that our consciousness is either material by nature, or so closely associated with matter as to be altogether dependent on it. How then, we ask, can consciousness survive death, and not perish when our material nature perishes?

And yet, on the other hand, how much there is that points in a contrary direction ! For instance, what a strange capacity we possess of viewing ourselves, especially our bodies, from an outside point of view; as if our consciousness were a thing which is separate from, and altogether independent of, our material nature ! A grown man, for instance, is shown some photograph or picture of himself as he appeared in younger days. He feels amused at it, surprised it may be, but that is all. He does not attempt to account for his bodily development, nor yet to dispute it; he simply accepts it with astonishment and interest. "How strange!" he says. "To think I ever looked like that!" That is, he assumes a critical and independent attitude towards his body, naturally, and as a matter of course.

Nor, again, does anyone—whatever his country or intellectual attainments—find difficulty in entertaining the thought that, though at death the body perishes, yet *he* survives. He may not accept it as a proved conclusion, but the idea is conceivable by him—so easily conceivable that it forces itself upon his mind.

It seems that our natural attitude towards our body is one of detachment; is that of spirits who, complete in themselves, regard this appendage as familiar but strange; as useful and necessary, but other-

wise not part of us—as a traveller might regard his luggage, or even as this same body might regard its clothes.

How often, too, we criticise our memory ! We have “forgotten” something; but, for all that, we are conscious that we have forgotten it. We blame ourselves in consequence: “How dull I am!” or, “How stupid of me!” That is, a certain part of us proceeds to criticise the working of another part (presumably our brain), and pass judgment on its feebleness. We have not simply lapsed into unconsciousness with reference to the whole subject, as we might expect.

In short, however much the body may affect our consciousness, the fact remains—we do not naturally regard our conscious selves as forming part of our bodies, or our bodies as forming part of our conscious selves. We view them as distinct and different, and therefore potentially separable. This is the view that religion and philosophy have always held with reference to our human nature. We are spiritual beings, and the body is our material envelope.

After all, why should our natural estimate of ourselves be other than trustworthy?

* * * *

And actual facts, so far as we can observe them, tend to confirm this estimate. We are sometimes privileged to notice how a

person's "self" can remain untouched by bodily decay. This "self" appears to be an entity which is quite independent of its material envelope. One moment our friends are with us just as we have always known them—natural and complete. In spite of the body's weakness, every word, every action, bespeak the old true self—the personality that we have known so long, and loved so well. Then, next moment, this self is gone!

In some instances the change is so sudden as to be almost startling. It has the semblance of an eclipse—the sudden obscuration of some moon or star—rather than a gradual wasting and decay. The body has been watched all through a process of dissolution, and we have foreseen its natural end. Yet, in spite of all this which so profoundly modifies the body, the personality—the real man—remains essentially the same. There is no change—no sign of disintegration—that can be distinguished here. Provided the mind remains clear, the self—the personality—as such, persists to the end. It seems to be something which dwells above and beyond the region of the perishable, something quite distinct from that material envelope with which it is so closely associated. The "outward man" may perish; but the "inward man" remains unchanged.

And not only do we thus dissociate ourselves from our bodies, but we dissociate ourselves with equal readiness from the material world in which we live. We regard ourselves as something quite distinct from our environment. We seem, indeed, to be personalities introduced into the world from outside the world (which behold it, and wonder at it!) rather than parts or products of the world—mere vitalised matter, and nothing more. We feel ourselves to be just as distinct from the rivers and the mountains as we do from our own bodies, or from other individuals of our own race.

It is this fact which, perhaps more than any other, renders it extremely difficult to believe in any theory of the material origin of man. For surely no process of evolution can have produced this property, this strange power we possess of dissociating ourselves from all that surrounds our consciousness.

We can, for example, contemplate the sun, and, realising its marvellous life-giving properties, may go so far as to imagine its power evolving vegetable life, and possibly the lower forms of animal life. But can it have evolved a creature, such as ourselves, which beholds the sun, and asks: What is it? Where did it come from? Whence arise such light and heat?—a creature which strives to estimate its

age and measure its distance? Is this possible? Can the sun have thus evolved its own examiners? If so, then surely the heathen are right and Christians are wrong: the SUN IS GOD, and all else nothingness!

BIRTH AND DEATH.

What is death, and what is birth? or, rather, what is the relationship that they bear to each other? The question is not without significance.

If we examine the matter, we find that death has the appearance of being the *complement* of birth, rather than the direct antithesis; it seems to be something which fulfils our birth, rather than something which opposes it. Birth begins our life in this world, it is true, and death most certainly ends it; but death is no mere negative, for all that.

For if it were so—if death were the negation of birth, and its function the complete undoing of it—we should expect to end our life by the reversal of the process by which we first began it. We should expect, for example, that we should attain our maximum of stature and intellect, and then gradually reverse the process of development until we lapsed back into infancy, unconsciousness, and nothingness once more. We should expect, moreover,

that our character would cease to develop, and revert gradually to what it was before its development commenced. We should, further, expect that our love would also enter on a backward process; that the bonds by which love binds us to those around us would gradually become loosened; until finally, before we die, we should arrive at a state of complete indifference, and love thus cease to be.

If such had been the case, there could have been no question about the nature of death, or as to what it signified. The rational conclusion suggested by such a process would have been obvious to all. Death, we should have said, is the anti-thesis of birth; each carries on the same process, and each proceeds in an opposite direction. We sprang (apparently) from nothing, and we end as we began.

As things are, we find the opposite is the case. We go through a process of gradual development, until, with fully developed powers of mind and body, with character matured, and with love in fullest exercise, we come to an abrupt conclusion. The process, as we find it, seems to indicate a forward, not a backward movement. *It suggests a continuity or evolution into something beyond.* In spite of the fact that sometimes man perishes in his youth, or even infancy—notwithstanding the fact that, for a short period, old

age may cause a weakening of man's powers—yet it is the rule of life that man meets death at the climax of his development. Is death, then, the negation of birth, the final close of all that birth brought with it? Or does death give to birth its true fulfilment, and introduce us to a further stage of life? The point, to say the least of it, seems to call for answer. What does life's progress really indicate? We sprang (apparently) from nothing; but we do *not* end as we began.

SLEEP AND DEATH.

On the other hand, sleep appears to be a true correlative of death. There is so much that is similar between the two that men, in all ages, have remarked upon it. We habitually describe death in terms of sleep. We use such phrases as the "*sleep of death*"; or, "*he fell asleep*" (Scripture thus describes the death of Stephen); or, as in the well-known words of CHRIST, "*The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*" And not only in Christian times, but in earlier days as well. "*A long sleep,*" says Horace,* speaking of death. "*And slept an iron sleep,*" says Homer,† speaking of the same. "*The twin-brethren, sleep and death,*" says Homer again,‡ calling atten-

* Horace, C. III. xi. 38. † "Iliad," xi. 241.

‡ *Ibid.*, xvi. 672.

tion to their close relationship. And doubtless in other writers, of other times and countries, we should find the same.

If, then, we are right in interpreting the things which we do *not know* by the things which we *know*; if argument by analogy does not mislead us, then the meaning of death is to be sought in the meaning of sleep, and we rightly interpret the mystery of the one by our certain knowledge of the other. If, moreover, this similarity has been so ordered by Divine appointment; if we believe, with St. Paul, that "*the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,*" then it would appear that not only are we permitted to interpret the one by the other, but that we are at fault if we do not so interpret them.

For sleep is one of Nature's methods of renewal. In health or sickness no form of rest can equal it. "*If he sleep, he shall do well.*" So also death. If we rightly interpret the matter, this also is one of Nature's methods of renewal. By this means, also, Nature restores our wearied energies. From this rest, too, we rise invigorated for the labours of another day.

And when we see men die with minds grown rich with the wisdom and knowledge of a lifetime; with characters matured by the experiences of many years; with love

entwining itself with infinite tenderness round all it touches,—we see in death, not an end of all these things, but a new beginning; not a destruction of life's accomplishments, but a gift of further opportunities. We grow to realise that death is not love's enemy, but in truth love's friend; that when, at last, death lulls to rest our tired senses, we shall come to no sudden or abrupt conclusion, but pass onward, refreshed and strengthened, to a great awakening;—to think and pray, to work and serve, to live and love, elsewhere.

* * * *

Nor do we press the comparison unduly if we observe that sleep does not merely restore the mind, but restores the body also.

Sleep would be no sleep if it restored the one without the other—if it were to reinvigorate the mind, and leave the body worn out and useless. The question therefore follows: Is death also to be regarded as one of Nature's processes by which the worn-out body is restored and made ready for a further period of conscious life?

Science tells us that a body is necessary for the full expression of the soul; that we are not complete without it; that the dependence of our spiritual selves on some

vehicle of manifestation, such as our present body, is not a temporary phase of our existence, but is probably the expression of some permanent truth.

Faith tells us that not only are we incomplete without the body, but that one day we shall put on a body which shall bear so close a relationship to our present body as to constitute the *same* body. It tells us that our present body will be changed, transformed, into another and more glorious body—fitted for another and more glorious life. Faith tells us, also, that this change can be accomplished only through death.

Science, then, suggests it, religion asserts it, and the analogy of sleep keeps bringing the subject continually before our minds. Sleep—awakening. Sleep—renewal. Death—and *what?* Do what we will, we cannot escape the question or the answer that is suggested to us. There is created within our minds a sense of wonderment, almost expectancy, which, though sometimes unconscious, is never suffered altogether to fade away. By a kind of automatic and perpetual suggestion, sleep seems to hint to us that in the case of death there is something yet to follow; that we see but part of things; that the decay and dissolution of the body, which now perplexes us, is but another of Nature's healing processes; that it does

not really matter; that it need not distress us; for, as the poet expresses it,

“ This worn-out old stuff, which is threadbare To-day,
May become Everlasting To-morrow.”

BEYOND ALL PRICE.

We are told that the human soul has a great—nay, an untold—value in the eyes of GOD. Nor is it a difficult matter to believe it, for how great a value it has in our own! All we have in this world, all the material things of life—our goods, our possessions, things great or small—can lose all value and all meaning for us because of the absence of one sweet soul. Even to us a single human personality can be beyond all price. What wonder, then, that GOD should teach us that the soul is everything, and all else naught!

Some would see in this a token of our immortality. Assuming that this world is the deliberate expression of the purpose of a loving GOD, the human soul, it is contended, is a thing of too great a value to be destroyed. It is an entity of so unique a character—each soul carrying with it an individuality all its own, each differing from all others, each with its own peculiar gifts—that it forms a contribution, and a valuable contribution, to

the "sum of things." All else may perish, all that is material in the world around us may come to an end, and there be no serious loss; but Man—the individual man—with his personality, his powers and infinite possibilities, is of too great a value to end in nothingness. The loss, in this case, would be irreparable. What else but he could take his place in the Divine plan of the universe? Who but he could fill that place which GOD designed that he should fill—which, therefore, he alone is fit to fill? Man is the product of the ages; *GOD has taken trouble with him*; indeed, the Christian Faith assures us, GOD took upon Himself our flesh, and died a painful death, in order to restore him to his true destiny and uplift the race. How then, we ask, shall man be to-day, then cease to be to-morrow? *Was he made for no greater purpose than to be destroyed?*

AN ARGUMENT.

There are many arguments for immortality. No single one will appeal to every man, for they are not "proofs" in the strict sense of the term; they are rather of the nature of demonstrations to the intellect of a truth which is believed on other and deeper grounds.

But an argument which appeals to very

many in this connection is derived from the fact that Nature never stultifies herself, and that the instinct of immortality which is implanted so deeply and universally in man's nature cannot prove deceptive—in other words, a faculty for perceiving implies something to be perceived.

In Nature we find no instance in which natural instinct has deceived either animal or bird. An instinct to fly, and wings as instruments of flight, imply an atmosphere wherein to fly. A desire to move, with organs for motion, implies an area whereon to move. Hunger implies food, thirst implies water, love implies an object to be loved. Whatever the desire, or whatever the instinct, Nature provides a channel for their exercise; she never calls forth a function or a faculty without a use. Then why,

“ . . . this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
This longing after immortality ” ?

as Addison so well expresses it. Is this instinct alone to prove fallacious? Are we to believe that because it belongs to man—man who is the crown of Nature's processes—because it is one of the highest, most spiritual, most universal, and most ennobling of his perceptions, that therefore it is meaningless? Are we to believe, because man hungers for the great and infinite, that therefore it is a hunger for which there is no bread?

SOUL AND INTELLECT.

But whatever value we may be disposed to place on argument in this connection, it is certain we lose much if we rely upon our intellect as the sole test of truth. The greatest and most far-reaching truths are, of necessity, beyond its reach. The proposition, in such cases, is seldom a purely intellectual one; and therefore the intellect is not the faculty which has power to decide. Moral and spiritual considerations also come in; moral and spiritual faculties also claim a hearing; and the final verdict will rest with them.

It certainly is so in the case in point. Prove to a man, on purely intellectual grounds, that all is nothingness; demonstrate to his reason that there is neither GOD nor spirit, nor life to come,—and he will still remain unsatisfied. He may not be able to detect a flaw in the argument, but he cannot accept the conclusion. There is something within him which forbids it. It all seems cold, unsatisfying; it produces a sense of incongruity within himself; *it does not reach as far as he feels that he can go*. Therefore his natural self asserts itself; he leaps beyond all argument; and, with a conviction born of other sources, he goes forward fearlessly into realms unknown. He feels, he touches, and he needs no more.

Such is the greatness of our human nature, that you cannot cage it nor confine it. You cannot so argue with it as to make it unconscious of its own origin; it refuses to grow forgetful of the fount from which it sprung. We came from GOD, and nothing less than GOD will satisfy us. We feel we are immortal, and the hope of immortality will ever rise unbidden in the human breast.

Our personality is a complex thing. It has many faculties. We possess the power of reason, certainly; but we possess other and greater powers as well. "*Great thoughts come from the heart,*" said a certain writer; and it is vain for us to attempt to silence them! Sooner or later we claim our own.

* * * *

Therefore—and we need not be surprised at it—our sense of immortality will grow with our personal devotion. To a soul that knows what it is to be united to GOD by a real but mystical union, immortality needs no proof. The experience carries its own conviction. The fact that such a soul has been conscious of a union with the Everlasting Himself renders it impossible for it to conceive that such a union should be temporal, or terminate abruptly in the grave.

GOD *cannot* cast off a soul that has known and touched Him so closely! No beast will discard its own offspring. No man would willingly suffer his friend to perish,—not even his body—least of all that inward soul of his which makes affinity between them possible, and calls forth love. How, then, can a GOD who loves reject and destroy the souls that love Him?

And that GOD does love, and is therefore lovable, is made plain to His lovers by the fact that they have loved!

Happy souls such as these are impatient of argument. What more do they want? So true it is, as the hymn expresses it:

“ Before we upward pass to heaven
We taste our immortality.”

CHAPTER VI

STRONGER THAN DEATH

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”—CANT. viii. 7.

LOVE'S NATURE.

RETROSPECT.

DETACHMENT.

A NEW BIRTH.

A QUESTION.

THE SANCTITY

OF SUFFERING.

BITTER - SWEET.

A SEAL.

IN AFTER-YEARS.

STRONGER THAN DEATH

LOVE'S NATURE.

LOVE is a quality of so large a nature that it is easily limited and therefore degraded.

Popular opinion tends to regard it as a quality which finds its chief sphere of exercise between man and woman.

Science adopts this limitation, and tends to limit it still further. Love, she would tell us, is but a device of Nature to insure the continuance of the species. The romance, the poetry, the subtlety, the intensity, the despair and joy of it all, is a mere illusion. It is, in fact, a trick; it is the bait with which Nature prepares the trap by which she desires to ensnare the individual into personal sacrifice for the good of the race. It is exactly paralleled, all along the line of life, by the elaborate, and often grotesque, allurements by which Nature would attract to each other her various creatures of opposite sex.

The sweetness of human love is to be compared, therefore, to the sweetness of a flower, whose glowing colours and volup-

tuous fragrance are intended by Nature to attract the winged insects, whose visits are necessary for the fertilisation of the seed. The colour fades, the flower falls, the perfume vanishes, death soon follows after; but Nature is not mocked.

We need not question the truth of this as far as it goes. And if we make the unwarranted assumption that, when one of the Creator's purposes is made manifest, we have got to the end of the matter, then love between man and woman is a limited and illusory thing indeed.

But "True Love," to use the common term, does not exist only between man and woman. Love is a matter of mental and spiritual affinity. The true end of love is mutual ennoblement; its purpose in the married life is to consecrate mere physical attraction and uplift and beautify all family life; but otherwise it does not concern the sexes. The realms of lust and love lie worlds apart.

Nor do we, of necessity, find love at its best between woman and woman; though woman possesses in an eminent degree those tender qualities which exercise so large an influence on human life.

Love equally true, equally tender, and equally romantic, may exist between man and man. If Tennyson's great poem "In Memoriam" had done no other service, it would certainly have done great service

if it had only availed to make this plain. The historic instance of the love between David and Jonathan is another case in point. And what more striking and enduring record of tender and romantic affection can history offer us than that?—between a prince of the blood and an outlawed shepherd boy! “*Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.*”

These two instances alone are sufficient to lift our whole conception of the matter into higher regions, far above the temporal, let alone the sexual, into a region of another kind. They give us a picture of love pure and unsullied, and in both cases stronger than death.

And if to such instances as these we add the love of a mother for her children (a love so tender and deep that it can only be measured by the joy she feels in any and every act of self-sacrifice on her child's behalf); and if to this we add the love of a father in like manner (a love so strong and, we trust, so wise and far-seeing, that it has been chosen by the Supreme Himself as the figure which best describes for us His own relationship to man)—so far as we do this, we get a further revelation of love in its true nature. We see it as a thing spiritual, living, and eternal; a faculty in the possession of which we realise, as on certain evidence, that man was created in the image of God.

Love is a quality which mocks at death, which overleaps it, feeds on it, is nourished by it, and finds its roots deep down in that part of us which is both immortal and Divine.

RETROSPECT.

We are unable to comprehend the full beauty of a landscape until we view it from a distance. As we wander over the plain or along the valley, a great part of our surroundings is, of necessity, hidden from us. But when we stand on the hill-top and look back upon it all, we see a harmony and a completeness which before had been concealed from notice; while the beauty of the distant horizon seems to call up within our hearts a sense of peace and restfulness which is altogether new.

Similarly, it is only when we look back upon a life as a thing of the past, that we see its full beauty and realise its due proportions. While we walked the vale of life together, the things of the moment, the details of every day, our interests, our anxieties, so much engrossed us that we had little thought of anything beyond. We stood so near that much was hidden from us. The temporal obscured the eternal, and the material the spiritual, in the lives of those we loved.

But now, when time has fled, when

death has separated, and we gaze backward from the distance, much which before had been invisible is now revealed to us; much which before seemed fair now seems doubly fair; much that, seen close to, appeared harsh or rugged now forms one of the fairest features of the retrospect; while an atmosphere ethereal, spiritual, inexpressible, pervades and sanctifies the whole.

We recall to our minds the beauty of the sunset. We turn in thought to those inspiring moments when all Nature is transformed and made twice beautiful by the sweet, half-sad, yet ever-golden glories of the vanished sun.

* * * *

How wonderful, for instance, is the love of a mother for her children! Perhaps some of us have had the privilege of contemplating the silent tokens of some such love, consecrated and made beautiful by the thought of death. There they are,—the little keepsakes, the tender recollections of earlier days, which she, while yet alive, had treasured up, but which death now brings to light. The childish letters, the lock of hair, the pencilled kisses—those simple tokens which common-sense would have destroyed, or wisdom laughed at—they are silent, but they speak with a

voice there is no mistaking across the intervening years.

To be called to witness such love, and to see something of its inner working, is indeed a privilege. It has a moral and spiritual beauty all its own—a beauty far transcending any material beauty that we can hope to see on earth. What landscape is there, what seascape, that can so bring tears to our eyes ?

* * * *

One thing, however, is quite evident: Whoever made a mother's love must have a great and tender heart. Reason would tell us this much, even though the voice of faith were silent. But when faith speaks we find another utterance: "*Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.*"

DETACHMENT.

Nor is it possible for us to avoid such retrospect. We cannot be unmindful of our beloved dead, however wise or convenient it might appear to be able to do so.

We are frequently warned (and rightly warned) to keep our affections "detached," or separate, from those things which we must, of necessity, leave behind us when

we die, such as our house, our money, or our property. For, since we must relinquish these things, it were wise to learn to relinquish them without regret, and to hold ourselves in readiness to be parted from them at any moment. And men can do this, and do it naturally and without difficulty.

It would appear to be equally wise to keep ourselves detached from those we love, and thus avoid the pain and sorrow that must certainly follow when the parting comes. In this case, however, we find we cannot do it. Love cannot be thus detached. It cannot be taken up and laid aside at will. To hold ourselves "detached" from those we love is to deny love's nature. Love is essentially close, personal, and intense. We cannot, even if we would, be rid of it. It endures to the end. It has the behaviour of a quality which is immortal by nature.

Certainly death, which detaches us outwardly from those we love, does not assist us towards an inward feeling of detachment. Indeed, the reverse is the case. Death sanctifies love, and deepens it; it seems to say to us, "Keep that quality, treasure it;—you will want it again!"

A NEW BIRTH.

For, account for it how we will, death adds an intensity to our love such as we never before experienced. Everything that reminds us of the loved one, now departed, stimulates this feeling. Even dead inanimate objects have power so much to move us that, owing to its very intensity, our love becomes a pain.

Looked at from the outside, this seems difficult to account for. Apart from actual experience, we might reasonably have expected otherwise. We loved them for what they were to us, for what they were wont to do or say, for their manners, their inward self, their outward form, their voice, their grace, their beauty. It was these things which called forth our love. These, apparently, were the *causes*; our love was the *effect*. Death comes and takes away these causes, and we should have expected it would thereby have taken away the effect as well. "Out of sight," and therefore "out of mind," might well have been the sequence,—death relieving the living of their love as certainly as it relieves the sufferers of their pain. But this is not the case. Indeed, we find the contrary. The cause is removed, yet the effect remains. That which called forth our love is taken away, yet the love itself grows more.

Again, when love began, that which gave meaning and intensity to it was the thought of the future and of all that the future might bring. Death comes and puts an end to the future (so far as this life is concerned), yet our love loses neither meaning nor intensity. It certainly is not concluded, as we might expect. Though all which first called forth our love is taken away—the person we loved, the future that we lived for—though all has been enjoyed and has now come to an end, yet love refuses to go with it. It lives on as if its chief purpose still held good for it, as if its future were more than ever assured to it, as if itself were an entity which can never die.

First love is deep, as the poets remind us, but last love is deeper! Alone, and without the visible presence of the loved one, love lives on. It seems to be preparing itself, to be gathering fresh intensity, for the journey which lies before it, over years and changes yet to come. It is summoning its energies, so to speak, for the leap across the chasm; for the last great plunge from time into eternity;—feeling assured that there, and there only, it can realize its perfect meaning and find its full completion, as (no longer alone, but together with the loved one) it falls in humble yet adoring rapture before the throne of GOD.

Nor is this sense of the enlargement of love after death peculiar to a few. All men feel it. To some degree, at any rate, it is a natural and universal experience.

If, then, it be true, as science asserts, that Nature never creates a desire without also providing a means of satisfying that desire, how are we to account for this strange fact? A desire, we are told, implies the means of satisfaction. Desire does not subsist alone, without meaning or purpose. This is one of Nature's universal laws. If, then, death be the end of all things, what is the meaning of this new birth of love? What does it indicate? Where is it to find its natural scope? *It seems to lack all meaning*, nor can we in any way explain it.

Moreover, it is contrary to reason. That GOD should stimulate a desire by the very act which makes its gratification no longer possible is anomalous, to say the least of it. Faith assures us, and reason confirms it, that love which thus triumphs over death shall find a satisfaction—indeed, its only true and perfect satisfaction—when death shall be no more.

* * * *

Or can it be that this survival of love for those that have left us is designed to soften our hearts and enlarge our sym-

pathies for others who are still alive? Yet even so, if love has no further meaning, it does but mock us. For why should we learn to love others if love is vain? Why should we suffer ourselves to be again deceived by it? Why not rather steel our hearts and narrow our affections, and live in peace?

No, every tear that is shed by an open grave betokens a future that is yet to be revealed to us. Tears can have no other meaning. If death be an end, and love shall know no future, tears are nothing but a meaningless survival. They betoken the painful continuance (nay, the increased activity) of a faculty for which we have no further use.

* ' * * *

But, however this may be, the fact remains: Death deepens and intensifies our love. Yet this very love we bear, just because it is love, compels the question: "What means death?"

Thus love supplies both malady and antidote; for love will accept one answer only: "Death is nothing; love endures."

A QUESTION.

Yet how are we to account for the fact itself? What is the cause of this fresh access of love that death brings with it? Whence does it originate? Whence comes this sanctifying touch by which death melts our hearts, rekindles our affections, and makes love endure?

Is it that death, by removing—as it does—the ordinary and familiar things of life, thereby restores *romance* to love? There is so much that is ordinary and commonplace in our everyday surroundings; there is, moreover, so much that tests our love—the anxieties, the efforts, the wear and tear of every day—that love at times becomes obscured, and appears to grow less precious to us. It seems to lack the charm and novelty, the romance and poetry, which marked it at the first. Is it that death, by taking away these ordinary and familiar things of life, lets love go free?—and that the new love that is born in us is but our former love restored to us, freed from its weariness, its trammels, its hindrances, its pain? Nay, but this new love is something deeper and more sacred than our former love. Death brings with it an element which is quite its own. Death adds to our love and consecrates it, but it does not *restore* it. Love, when true, does not need to be restored; and love is

always a thing romantic, even among the common things of life.

Or is it that death leads us to recall past memories in the lives of those we loved, and that, in so doing, we discern graces and beauties which before had been forgotten or overlooked? But how should death have power to persuade us to recall such memories? Why should they formerly have been overlooked?

Or is it that, inasmuch as we no longer know the departed after the flesh (by material signs and symbols), but after the spirit, we therefore know them after a closer and more perfect fashion, and love them more in consequence?

Or is it that they actually have grown more perfect and more lovable because they have passed within GOD'S nearer presence, and that, by some power of intuition or through some unseen contact, we feel them to be other and better than they were before?

Who shall decide the question? Is the answer to be found in any of these reasons, or is there still some further reason that we cannot discern? GOD knows. Love comes from Him, and, like Himself, is beyond all measurement and exceeds all thought.

* * * *

In fact, love and death appear to be so joined together, so closely linked to one

another, that we cannot separate them. They seem to be parts or manifestations of the same thing.

We find the highest example of this commingling in the Cross of CHRIST. The Cross is a picture, sketched by the Divine Hand, of love and death as joined in one. Taking the world as it is, GOD'S love, as revealed in CHRIST, could never have been known in full intensity without CHRIST'S death. CHRIST'S death would have lost all meaning for us if separated from CHRIST'S love. Together they form a perfect combination; and such is their joint potency, that it is by this appeal, as exemplified in His own Person, that GOD redeemed, and still redeems, the world.

Love gives beauty and dignity to death; death gives depth and permanence to love. Each seems necessary to the other; either, without the other, is incomplete.

Who, then, shall separate what God hath joined?

THE SANCTITY OF SUFFERING.

Nor is it death only that thus ministers to love. Suffering also plays a kindred part. It may seem strange, yet it is certainly true, that the memory of their sufferings, so far from destroying love, does very much to keep our love alive.

The pain they endured, the weary hours they waited, the gradual wasting of the body, the emaciated form, the sunken eye,—the memory of these things does not repel us as the memory of something vile or ugly. On the contrary, the beauty of the spirit which triumphed over these things seems to make suffering a thing beautiful in itself. All is transformed and uplifted as we call to mind a victory which the extremity of the suffering did but serve to emphasise, and a glory which was seen to be brightest at the moment when spirit most completely triumphed over flesh. We love them more, not less, because of all that they endured.

Indeed, we no longer regret their sufferings now suffering is over, however much we strove to shield them from suffering while they lived. We can even speak of death in tender terms—"beloved death," or "kindly death," and such-like—for we do not feel angry with death for having taken them away, so much as grateful to death for having made them so beautiful. Because they have suffered there is pity in our hearts, devotion, love. Suffering, we feel, has power to sanctify; it sanctifies both those who suffer and those who love the sufferer. We turn in thought once more to CHRIST upon the cross, and we realise that it was not only because He lived and died, but rather because He

loved and suffered, that the hearts of all men have been drawn towards Him as they have. We grow to understand how even the children of men may become His fellow-sufferers, and, as the Apostle expresses it, "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of CHRIST." We realise that, to a very limited though to a very real extent, man, by faith and patience, may share in His redemptive energy, and by virtue of his sufferings bring others, also, closer to the bosom of GOD.

BITTER-SWEET.

Death does not leave a sore heart, but rather a full one; not the soreness of a wound so much as an intensity of affection: an overflowing heart—a straining heart, if you will—even to painfulness.

This seems to be the true analysis. We would heal a wound, but we would not heal this ailment, even if we could. If it be pain, we recognise it as a pain which purifies, not as a wound which festers.

And when some memory comes back to us, so sweet, so painful, that we shrink from it, it is not the paining of a wound we shrink from, so much as the tension of a strain. We treasure the keepsake the more, and put it aside with care and tenderness, that we may read its meaning afresh

at some later period when the emotions it calls forth within us may be less intense.

The sound of music, with its touch of the infinite, will sometimes find expression for us, and in finding expression will give relief. For it is not a wounded heart nor a sore one that we suffer from, but a heart which reaches out to realms unseen—

“ A devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.”

* * * *

Indeed, the very reluctance with which we destroy old keepsakes—the things which they handled, the letters in the old familiar handwriting, or whatever else reminds us of the former presence of the departed—seems to indicate that the associations thus called up (intense and painful though at times they may appear to us) are not really what they seem.

We gladly banish from us all that is ugly or causes pain to us—all that is vile or melancholy or unwholesome—but not these! O GOD, not these! If there be pain here, it is a pain which sanctifies; if there be bitterness in such memories, it is a bitterness which gives place to sweetness. We weep, yet not for grief, but from a sense of deep emotion—an emotion stirred within us by a vision of tenderness and beauty which touches the deepest recesses of the heart.

We would not lose these memories. Nay, rather, may they grow each day more precious to us! May they live on independent of all material helps, all earthly keepsakes, strong and stately by themselves! May they still continue to bless and sanctify! May they serve to teach us that there is seldom bitterness without sweetness, seldom sorrow without gladness, that there is never night without its morning, nor death in CHRIST without a hope beyond.

A SEAL.

Moreover, death sets a seal to love. We feel that death, in a very real way, insures the permanency of love; for it places it beyond the reach of change or adverse circumstance.

Here, while life lasts, there is much that can destroy our love. Love has many enemies. Sin, selfishness, all that is base, or mean, or ugly, can destroy love so utterly as to make it seem that love had never been. Sad though it is, it is true, nevertheless: the fairest love can perish, the noblest love grow cold. Life brings with it such strains and storms, that to realise our love has reached the other shore unharmed, complete, and perfected, is cause for deepest thankfulness. The trial-time has passed, we feel. Love has proved triumphant,—and we are glad!

For if love had ended here, what hope could we have found that GOD would give us back our love elsewhere? But when love did *not* end here, but grew and passed away in full completeness, we do not ask that it shall be restored to us—it is ours already! We have it. We feel it. It is ready waiting for us on the other side.

Just as it is true that those who die in GOD'S faith and fear, die "saved"—saved, not from further progress or higher happiness, but saved from misery and endless loss—so it is with this we speak of: Love dies *saved!* Nothing now can change it; nothing divide, or mar, or spoil it. Unless we wilfully discard it or knowingly forfeit it, nothing now can make them love us less.

As they were when they left us, so will they be when next we shall meet them. Death fixes his seal: "*Thus it was, and thus it is, and thus it shall be*"—yesterday, to-day, and evermore!

* * * *

Nor can *our* love change towards *them*. No other earthly love can overshadow it, or supplant it, or make it less. Nay, but this love adds to all other loves, deepens them, consecrates them, and gives them power and life. Like a mother's love for her firstborn, love such as this is not exclusive, but inclusive; nothing that is

narrow or selfish can find place in it; it does not close the heart, it opens it; it does not block the entrance for others, it prepares the way! Alone and secure, such love reigns in our hearts supreme. A peculiar sense of sacredness has been added to it. Nothing can change it; no time nor circumstance can alter it; no rival can supplant it. It rests in the heart, deep, enshrined, and wonderful.

Love reigns eternally. Death sets his seal.

IN AFTER-YEARS.

Yet is this true? Shall love endure? Time, it has been said, is the healer of all sorrow. Can time kill all *love* as well? Sorrow, like joy, fades into the distance as the years go by. The joys that once so thrilled us, that seemed so fresh and all-engrossing; the sorrow that came so suddenly and took away the light of life; the care which beset us, and so much distressed us—all these pass from us! We half forget them, we half grow used to them. Other cares, other joys, other sorrows, press forward and seem to take their places. Memory seems to fade. The grief that once seemed new now seems old: it has lost its sting, its former sharpness. All seems soft and mellow in the mist of bygone years.

It is well that it is so. It is well that man should grieve; it is also well that he should not grieve for ever. As GOD is merciful, the sorest wound will heal.

All passes, all changes; memory fades, grief vanishes; but love continues! Suddenly, when we least expect it, all comes back to us. Somebody, something—a letter, a flower, a verse, a voice, a strain of music—something brings all back to memory. And the heart swells, and the eyes grow dim, and love is there. Our love may have escaped from consciousness; it has not left us otherwise. Love is there, as deep, as true as ever—fixed in the heart, unchanged.

Time, which changes all else, cannot change this. Years, which weaken the body and enfeeble the mind, cannot weaken this, or make this grow feeble. Memory may seem to fade, and love fade with it; but love is no more dependent on memory than memory on love. Memory has power to probe the heart and tell us what is there, but it does not make the heart or fill it with its fulness. It reveals to us a picture of the past, it links it to the present, and we find love in both!

Yes, love is there; to-day as yesterday; hidden but actual; deep down but ready waiting—waiting as if for something yet to be revealed to it. Waiting—for what?

We rejoice that this is so. We feel glad

that love should thus betray its lofty origin; that with love—as with Him who made it—neither “variableness” nor “shadow of turning” can find a place. It is good for us to realise that human love is a reflection of Divine love, and therefore strives to follow the Divine example: “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

“ No single tear, no mark of pain !
 O sorrow—then can sorrow wane ?
 O grief—can grief be changed to less ?

O last regret—regret can die !
 No ! mixt with all this mystic frame,
 Her deep relations are the same,
 But with long use her tears are dry.”

CHAPTER VII

“ FAR BETTER ”

“ For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with CHRIST; which is far better.”
—PHIL. i. 23.

“ TO DIE IS GAIN.” “ WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS.”

“ FAR BETTER ”

“ TO DIE IS GAIN.”

WHEN the aged leave us, we say within ourselves: “ They have lived their life; it has come to its natural conclusion. Death must come some time, and the Scriptures tell us that death is gain.”

When others leave us after broken health or years of suffering, we find our consolation in some such thoughts as these: “ They are freed from their affliction; it was a ‘ happy release ’; life offered no further prospect for them—death *may* be gain.”

But when the young and active leave us, suddenly, of quick disease, in pride of life, and with no infirmities, we feel a hesitation: “ *Is death a gain ?* ”

But why do we hesitate ? Is death to be reckoned a good angel only when earth offers small attraction ? Is the next life to be counted merely as “ second best ” to this ? Are we so enamoured of our present existence that we must deem it the sum of all blessedness, and the limit of the possibilities that pertain to an infinite

GOD? Cannot He who is the " LORD and Giver of Life " be trusted to give life—and more abundant life—when and where He may deem fit? We did not call forth our present life: He did. He understands what life is, and what death is also: we do *not*.

Shall we, then, reproach Him, criticise Him, raise up broken columns in the graveyards, that men may see and take notice that GOD can begin, but cannot complete;—that He may have purposes for us in this life, but cannot be trusted for aught beyond?

" To me to live is CHRIST, and to die is gain," said St. Paul. And again, " For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with CHRIST; which is far better."

Surely the answer is not far to seek. Death is not an end, but a beginning; not the close of life, but its infinite extension. It does not take away life, but increases it—either for glory or for shame. He that is holy will be holy still; he that is unrighteous will be unrighteous still.

But to those that love the LORD death means fulfilment—one great step nearer, a fruition, a blessedness, a peace such as this world cannot give. It means new life, new joy, new youth, new-found activities, new preparation, and new discipline. Truly, whether young or old, whether in

the time of suffering or in the days of activity, always and at all times, for such as these “ to die is gain.”

“ Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is the fulness of joy: and at Thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.”

* * * *

Yet life is sweet. We naturally cling to it, even fight for it, by a primal instinct. We cherish it fondly, and how often vainly! in those we love.

It seems quite certain—However great the hope held out to us hereafter, we were not born to regard life as a burden, and death as a welcome release. GOD seems to say to us: “ Your present duty is to live. It will suffice to do that faithfully. The time of your death, like the time of your birth, must rest with ME.”

* * * *

“ Our present duty is to live.” Yet if we could know and realise the life of that “ other world ” with an intensity amounting to actual experience; and if that life be—as we are assured it is—“ far better,” there can be no doubt such knowledge would be unprofitable for us to a high degree. *It would unfit us for our life here ;* we should be overwhelmed with a Divine discontent-

ment; a profound impatience would take hold of us; we should be unable, even if not unwilling, either to work or wait.

And if such knowledge would be unprofitable for us, how great is that Wisdom which has rendered such knowledge largely impossible for us as well! In other words—assuming the next life to be "far better" than this life—our realisation of that excellence cannot, consistently with GOD'S wisdom, be suffered to exceed that instinct to live which He has implanted in our nature.

* * * *

Browning even goes so far as to suggest that the purpose of this world is to hide GOD from us, rather than to reveal Him to us, lest our very mind should wither in the unveiled contemplation of Him as He is.

" Some think creation's meant to show Him forth;
I say it's meant to hide Him all it can.
Its use in time is to environ us
Against that sight, till we can bear its stress
Under a vertical sun. The exposed brain
And lidless eye and disimprisoned heart
Less certainly would wither up at once
Than mind, confronted with the sight of Him."

It is certainly true that this present life of sight and sound hides GOD from us quite as much as it discloses Him. Life may well be regarded as a veil which is interposed to prevent the brightness of

such a revelation as would effectually hinder us from seeing anything else.

We may complain, as people sometimes do, that our knowledge of the next world is no greater than it is; but, obviously, such knowledge cannot be suffered to exceed a certain limit. If there is a “crown of life” to be bestowed hereafter on GOD’S faithful servants, it is good for us to know it; yet *not* so to know it as to unfit us for our present duty—which is to live both happily and contentedly in obedience to His will.

* * * *

Yet it is wonderful to see how this “love of life” vanishes when GOD calls us onward. People, when the summons comes, do not as a matter of fact desire life, but rather the contrary. As a rule we find them “ready to go,” we sometimes think too ready to go—often anxious to go, sometimes desiring death exceedingly.

And the natural desire to escape from the body’s weariness or suffering does not altogether account for this. For it is just in those cases where pain is absent, where the mind is fully conscious, where a sense of peace and rest has already come, that we find this feature most strongly manifested. Freedom from pain seems to give the soul its opportunity; and in the case of those who have been “with Him from

the beginning " the desire becomes a longing and the waiting a strain on patience.

GOD calls the soul: it seems to know His voice and strives to answer. It is a kind of " homing " instinct; the desire to be *here* becomes a desire to be *there*,—which is " far better."

" WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS."

How wonderfully GOD uses our affection to draw us onward to this " other " world! When all we love is here, this world constitutes our natural home. The future world seems dim and distant to us. We may hear of it, we may believe in its existence; but it is not personal to us, it is not a matter of real practical concern. Accordingly, our interests are of this world, and concern this world only; our horizon does not extend beyond it; our thoughts are narrowed and our aspirations limited. "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,*" said the Great Teacher; and our treasure is with us *here and now!*

But when death comes there is a change. Death places those we love upon the farther shore, and both our thoughts and our affections take a new direction. *Love draws us onward.* The other world becomes a place of interest to us. Where is it? what is it? what are they doing?

what is their estate? We have given a precious hostage to this other world; it has now become our personal and close concern. The centre of our life and aspirations has moved forward. Our “ treasure ” is no longer here, but there. Therefore our hearts become enlarged, our horizon is extended: our thoughts pass forward, without effort, from the present to the future; from earth to Paradise; from the material to the spiritual; from the seen to the unseen;—as we still continue to live and love.

It would appear, indeed, that the activities of love and death together constitute the *natural process* by which the Creator seeks to detach us from earth, to link us with the other world, and to draw us into closer union both with one another and with Himself.

* * * *

— And herein we seem to find the answer to another question: Why did that infant die? Why was it born to die so soon, after those few short hours of life? Or, on the other hand, Why was it born—born afflicted with the very malady which caused its death, predestined to an existence as troubled as it was brief? Had Nature erred? Was all in vain?

Yet how dear was that young life to her who gave it birth! How strong and

pitiful was that mother's new-born love! The very brevity of it all, the seeming vanity of it, the pain and pathos of it, only added to that love and made it stronger. Brief though the experience, time can never efface it. There is one whose heart will never forget the new love which was born in her, or the despair which tortured her, or the tender impress of those infant lips.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." That much is true; and herein we seem to find an answer to the difficulty. GOD calls not one, but *two*—not the child only, but the mother also! By her love for her child, by sweet Nature and the heart's affection, by her agony, as well as by her rapture, He binds her with a sacred bondage, and draws her to Himself.

" All which I took from thee I did but take,
 Not for thy harms,
 But just that thou mightst seek it in My arms.
 All which thy child's mistake
 Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
 Rise, clasp My hand, and come."

* * * *

Nor is it our assurance of immortality which causes our affections thus to lead us onward. King David had little knowledge of the future life. "The life of the world to come" was in no sense an article of his creed. Yet love for his child made his

faith real without the aid of dogma, his intuition true without form or creed. " I shall go to him," he said, " but he shall not return to me."

He leaps the gulf with seeming ease. The thought of death becomes a source of joy and consolation to him. He no longer fasted, and he no longer wept: many were astonished at him in consequence. "*I shall go to him,*"—That was sufficient! Death becomes the bridge by which he also shall cross over, and love the magnet which draws him to his child.

CHAPTER VIII

“THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME”

“In My FATHER’S house are many mansions.”—
JOHN xiv. 2.

THE SHADOW OF HEAVEN. “THE EVERLASTING
ARMS.” TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. THE HUMAN
FAMILY. “THE CHIEF END OF MAN.”

“THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME”

“THE SHADOW OF HEAVEN.”

WHAT will the next world be like? how can we picture its surroundings? Will it be like this world, or unlike it? Is there any resemblance that can be traced between the two?

In any case, it is certain that, if we cannot describe the other world in *terms of this world*, it is unknowable; for those are the only terms we know by which to describe it. If it is not permissible for us to argue from the known to the unknown in this matter; if this world is not analogous to the other world, and in some real sense a type or figure of it,—then all hope of knowledge concerning it is at an end.

And not only so, but it must cease to be an object of intelligent interest to us. We can take no interest in a condition or locality concerning which we know nothing, except simply the fact that it cannot be known.

Moreover, if this world has nothing in

common with the next world, then it is out of analogy with the rest of things, and GOD has deceived us. For, as far as we can observe, there are traits which are common to the whole of the material creation. The natural elements, for instance, appear to pervade the universe. Is there, then, nothing in common between the world of matter and the world of spirit? Is the spiritual world so different from the material world that we must expect to find everything constituted differently because it is spiritual, and all things altogether new because no longer material?

Our SAVIOUR speaks of a "FATHER'S house," of "many mansions." He tells us He goes to "prepare a place for us," making use of some of the most familiar terms of earth. In the Book of Revelation we read of the "New Jerusalem," a city built on twelve foundations, with streets of gold and gates of pearl! We speak of "Paradise"; and "Paradise" suggests to us surroundings both new and old, blissful yet familiar;—it calls up visions of mountains, of rivers, of trees, of the sunshine, of the dew-drops, and all that eternal loveliness which, even in this world, pervades the handiwork of GOD. Are these, then, mere phrases and nothing more,—terms without a meaning? Or do they bespeak realities which, in truth, are largely beyond our compre-

hension, but of whose ultimate truth and actuality we cannot doubt? Milton asks:

“What if earth
Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?”

And the answer would seem to be that earth *is* the shadow of heaven, is the language which describes it, is the type which foreshadows it, and is the natural and only presentment under which it can be known. We may well believe that the faithful departed do not launch forth into the unknown, into the strange, much less into the terrifying, but into scenes that have already, in part, been known and loved by them—scenes that are new and glorious, yet not altogether unfamiliar—into the “house of many mansions”; into the “city which hath foundations”; into the peace and blessedness of “the Paradise of God.”

* * * *

Nor need we change our environment in order to enter on this “other world.” Analogy suggests that a change in our powers of perception would effect a far greater change, and bring about a far greater revelation, than any mere change of place or scene. To the fish this world offers an entirely different presentment from that which it offers to the bird or beast. Man,

on the other hand, perceives much that cannot be perceived even by the highest animal. He possesses the capacity to be thrilled by a sunset, by a landscape, or even by a picture or a work of art; and, being capable of higher thoughts, he can also experience higher joys than any lower creature. At the other end of the scale there is the vegetable. This lacks consciousness; and, by lacking consciousness, it lacks the key to all man's experiences; and though possessed of a form of life is dead compared with him.

No creature can see more than it possesses power to see. Some men are born blind, some are born deaf, and what a world of experiences is closed to them in consequence! Much exists of which our unaided senses take no cognisance—the waves by which the wireless message passes through the atmosphere, the scales on the butterfly's wing, the symmetry of the snow crystal: who can perceive them?

Indeed, our present senses have their obvious limitations. Man perceives but a fraction, and a very small fraction, of that which "is" in this present world, both here and now. Therefore it is not difficult to realise that, with a change in man's powers of perception, the whole world would become changed to him. He merely needs—not, indeed, a change in himself, but a change in his capacities, and, behold,

a new realm of experience bursts in upon his raptured consciousness! In fact, there is no limit that we can place to this possible “infinite.” There is no glory that we can imagine, nor joy that we can conceive, that is not possible, were GOD even now, on this side death, to give us eyes wherewith to see, and ears wherewith to hear.

We speak of Paradise, and we speak of Heaven. At times they seem far-off and distant to us. But there is no need for us to change our place, or even planet, in order to enter on these regions. We only need that, when we put off these our bodies, we put off also our present limitations; and thus, in accordance with His will, and in the measure which He has apportioned for us, we enter on those good things He “hath prepared.”

THE EVERLASTING ARMS.

After all, the same Providence who watched over us on our entry into this world will also watch over us on our entry into the next. And how loving was that care, how tender was His watchfulness! We experienced no sudden plunge into the unknown when first we made our entrance here. Our new-born spirits were not brought into sudden and terrifying contact with a strange environment; but

little by little our consciousness dawned upon us; and gradually, without pain or shock, we grew accustomed to our new surroundings. Weak and helpless though we were, all was made ready to support our weakness. Each of us was born into a *home*, where love and mutual service formed the natural atmosphere. Each of us was born into a *family*, where there were others—brothers, sisters—to form apt companions. Each of us was born under the special protection of a *father*, and each of us (even the poorest) was endowed with the untold riches of a *mother's love*. Surely, no more exacting or more sacred burden was ever laid on guardian angel than was laid on her who gave us birth! Surely, no guardian angel ever performed such duty more willingly or lovingly than she!

And when we come to die it is the same. Here again GOD sends His angel—some wife or husband, some friend or loving heart—to assuage our sufferings and minister to our many needs.

"On some fond breast the parting soul relies;
Some pious drops the closing eye requires."

And few are those, however unworthy, however abject, who are altogether denied these consolations. To all some minister is sent—to ease the pain, to soothe the weariness, to encourage, to sympathise,—or shed a tear.

And shall that Providence, who has gone thus far with us, go with us no farther? Shall He, who watched over us when first we entered on this strange planet, forget us as we enter on a further stage? Is it possible that He should grow unmindful of us, and fail us suddenly and altogether at the last?

Or, on the other hand, shall that loving care which tended us upon our deathbed not continue after death? Does GOD will that love should take us to the brink, and then desert us? Does He bid His angels wait on us in this life, yet give no commandment to them to welcome us beyond? Nay, rather, the love that tends us *here* is a sign of the love that awaits us *there*. We may be sure of the after-care because of the fore-care. We discern, in the love that follows us to our latest moments, an assurance—nay, an actual foretaste—of a far, far greater blessedness to come.

In short, wherever we may be, or under whatsoever conditions we may find ourselves, we cannot pass beyond the limit of the operation of GOD'S providence. His arms are “everlasting,” and everywhere outstretched.

As the poet Whittier expresses it:

“ I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.”

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

"Too good to be true!" How often we use that phrase! and how often, in the ordinary affairs of life, we use it with both truth and meaning! Yet when we come to consider the ultimate purposes of GOD for man—however much we may feel inclined to make use of some such phrase—is such a phrase admissible? Can anything which we can conceive be too good for truth when understood of Him who is Goodness ineffable? Have we any real ground for regarding our highest conceptions of GOD'S power and goodness as false, or even misleading? Are our lower conceptions of Him more likely to be true? Surely, our conscience bears us witness that we are nearer to GOD, and therefore nearer to Truth, when we think "good things" of Him, than when we think otherwise.

For, if we once allow the fact that the universe is presided over by a Mind, we must also allow the further fact that such Mind must be, in every way, supreme. Man's mind cannot go above or beyond the Supreme Mind in any way. On no grounds can we presume to exalt the mind of man over the mind of GOD. We cannot "think" of things which He has not thought of. The idea is inconceivable. "He which teacheth man knowledge, shall not He know?" as the psalmist expresses it.

How, then, when we come to consider the conditions of the next life, is it possible for the mind of man to exceed the mind of GOD in this particular? How can we imagine something which He has not imagined? How can even our most exalted conceptions exceed His conceptions? How, in short, can the mind of man conceive something more glorious than that which GOD hath prepared for them that love Him?

* * * *

Yet how often we feel misgivings when we try to picture to ourselves this other world! “He died young,” we say, “I have survived; shall I appear to him as one grown old when next we meet?” Or, again: “He was such an active man; he was never happy unless busily employed: is he inactive now, confined, shut in?” Or: “How she loved the flowers, the birds, the sunshine! they gave her the deepest, purest joys she knew: will there be flowers there, flowers which never wither? suns which never hasten to their setting? and songs which never cease?” Or: “Will that child which died in infancy find another mother there to love it—love it as its earthly mother loves it still?” Or: “Shall we know each other? shall we recognise each other as beings not unlike to what we were on earth?” “Shall we be able to converse

with one another, and call to remembrance the days of old?" These, and how many other questions like them, we ask, and ask in vain!

Yet how strange must all such questions sound in the ears of Him who made us! How easily satisfied we must appear to Him! How strange that we should ask no more! GOD made us as we are—our needs, and our power to satisfy those needs; our power to live, and the world we live in; our power to love, and those that are loved by us; our happiness, and those things which give us happiness. Everything we ask for there is what He has already given to us, *unmasked*, here. And yet we wonder, we doubt, and ask these questions!

Cannot we trust Him? Does not He who made us know what is necessary for our happiness far better than we do ourselves? Is there a joy which we have experienced here in this world that we could have imagined—let alone desired—had He not first given it to us of His own free will? Can we tell Him anything about ourselves that He does not know already? Is there anything about our human nature—its needs, its hopes—that we can reveal to Him? Then, if we cannot, let us rest content. GOD has called us to trust Him, not to doubt Him. He does not bargain with us for so much; He

simply tells us He will give us all we need. He seems to say to us: “I cannot explain these high matters to you, for you could not understand them. But there is not a joy which thrills you that I cannot multiply a thousandfold; not a need that I cannot satisfy, both above it and beyond it; not a wish that I cannot gratify by methods inconceivable; not a hope that cannot find fulfilment in ways unknown! I possess all power. I inhabit eternity. Nothing is too great for Me, nothing impossible. I love you; I love those that are loved by you. Trust Me. I AM GOD.”

THE HUMAN FAMILY.

And then, again, the fact that GOD has made us as we are, and constituted our existence here as He has constituted it, seems to have a meaning for us, and to give some indication of those things which shall be hereafter.

GOD does not, we may observe, bring us into the world as developed individuals, nor as isolated units. We do not come into being with full-grown bodies and fully developed minds, self-complete and self-reliant, independent of the help and services of our fellow-creatures. On the contrary, we are born not only in a state of dependence, but of abject dependence—as

helpless infants, as members of a family, where all our needs are provided for through others, and where the whole system is bound together and vitalised by the instinct of love.

It is conceivable, from one point of view, that GOD might have adopted the former of these alternatives, and brought us into the world developed and independent, or even employed some other method. Yet from another point of view it is not conceivable. For it is certain that an All-wise and All-powerful Creator would adopt whatever method He did adopt because it was the one best method possible for the end in view, and the one that was most conformable to His own essential nature. And instructive though it would be to view the manner of His working as a method chosen out of endless other possibilities, yet, strictly speaking, the Creator had no choice at all. Our human nature is as it is because GOD is as He is—infinite in wisdom and boundless in power.

The constitution, therefore, of the human family is not to be regarded as a chance phenomenon, but as a striking object-lesson of the method of the Divine working, and one that bears the impress of His character. Its chief characteristics may be regarded as eternal. The human family is the expression on this planet of GOD's eternal mode of operation. The principles

of mutual service, mutual dependence, and the uniting power of love, are not for here and here only, but for there also and for all time.

In the next world, therefore, we look to find the same principles at work—to an extended degree most certainly, but the same principles. Instead of an earthly family we look for a heavenly family; but it is a family we look for, all the same. Instead of alliances born of the flesh, we look for alliances born of the spirit. Instead of a love which varies, falters, and sometimes grows feeble, we look for a love grown perfect, which past adversity has fortified and past sorrows have made strong and pure. We look for the all-pervading presence of the HOLY SPIRIT—for a communion where mutual service shall be the highest source of happiness, where self-isolation shall be impossible, and where companionship shall be the companionship of saints.

* * * *

And all will be bound together and consecrated by the power of love. Love, which means so much here, cannot mean less there. There also it shall bring us its full measure of peace.

There is no true home without love. Love makes the spirit of home; and home, to be home, necessitates the spirit of love.

Love forms, as it were, the natural atmosphere wherein man's spirit can rest and be satisfied.

For, as it has been said, "Love has no purpose beyond itself; it is its own end. To say we love a person requires no explanation. It is a final self-explanatory fact. We cannot get behind it; but we feel we do not need to get behind it; it is an ultimate satisfaction in itself."

Hence, wherever there is love, there is satisfaction; and wherever there is satisfaction of this deep and primal character, there is home indeed.

And when we come to turn our thoughts to the great hereafter, there is little more we need to know concerning it than is indicated by the above consideration. The conditions of that other life may be such as we have never experienced; the question of locality may seem puzzling to minds that have been trained to think in terms of time and space; death may seem like a plunge into a vast, weird, and terrible ocean: but where love is, there is *home!* And GOD is Love, and GOD is there. And He by whom GOD made manifest His love is there as well. And those whom we have loved and lost are there also. And others, whom we have never known, are likewise there—to be known and loved by us, and to know and love us in their turn, for ever!

It is facts and possibilities like these

that bring assurance to the doubtful mind. For where there is some love, there is a measure of contentment; where there is much love, man's heart finds rest and peace; but where love is infinite (and GOD is infinite), there will surely follow a deep and endless sense of “homefulness,” such as thought cannot realise nor any word of man express.

THE CHIEF END OF MAN.

Just as in this world we find that our highest joys are of the spirit—as, indeed, are also our keenest woes—so it will be in the world to come. Our joys hereafter will be of the spiritual order—“spiritual,” as distinguished from that which is carnal, or even intellectual. And this, we may believe, is the highest form of joy that man can know. Even here we find that, just as intellectual pleasure is a higher form of pleasure than sensual pleasure, so the joys of the spirit—those joys which are experienced by the spiritual part of us—are the highest of all. To love and to be loved in return, to feel peace at heart, to repose in faith, to be thrilled by the beauty and glory of Nature, is a greater and far more joyful matter for us than to exercise our intellect or gratify our fleshly appetites. We can well believe that joy of this kind transcends

